METRO / A19
Chin-Chin Gutierrez hospitalized for 2nd-degree burns after saving mother from burning house

ACROSS / A15
9 backpackers linked to rebels freed by court

BUSINESS / B1
Neda says economy to grow 5.7% in 2007

NEWS / A2
P3B sought for repair of classrooms damaged by series of typhoons

'Bush's Last Day' gifts a hit this holiday season

ATAT NA ATAT NANG PAALISIN!

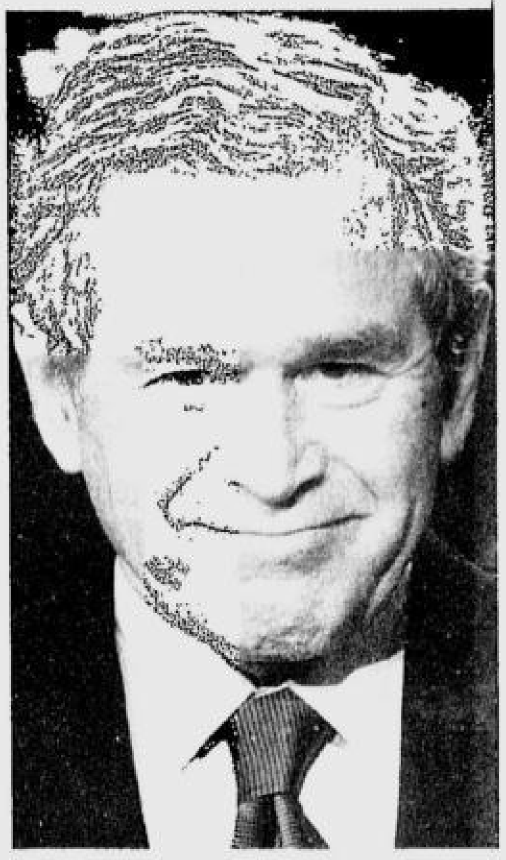
KANSAS CITY, MONTANA—Some of the T-shirts bear only the date: 01.20.09. But other T-shirts spell it out: "Bush's Last Day."

But both T-shirts, along with an assortment of "Bush's Last

BUSH'S/ A8

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS
Thursday, December 21, 2006 ★★ 5 sections / Vol. 22 / No. 13 P18 website: inquirer.net

US not winning war in Iraq, Bush admits



BUSH: We're not winning, we're not losing. But there have been some very positive developments. REUTERS

But plans to increase size of military

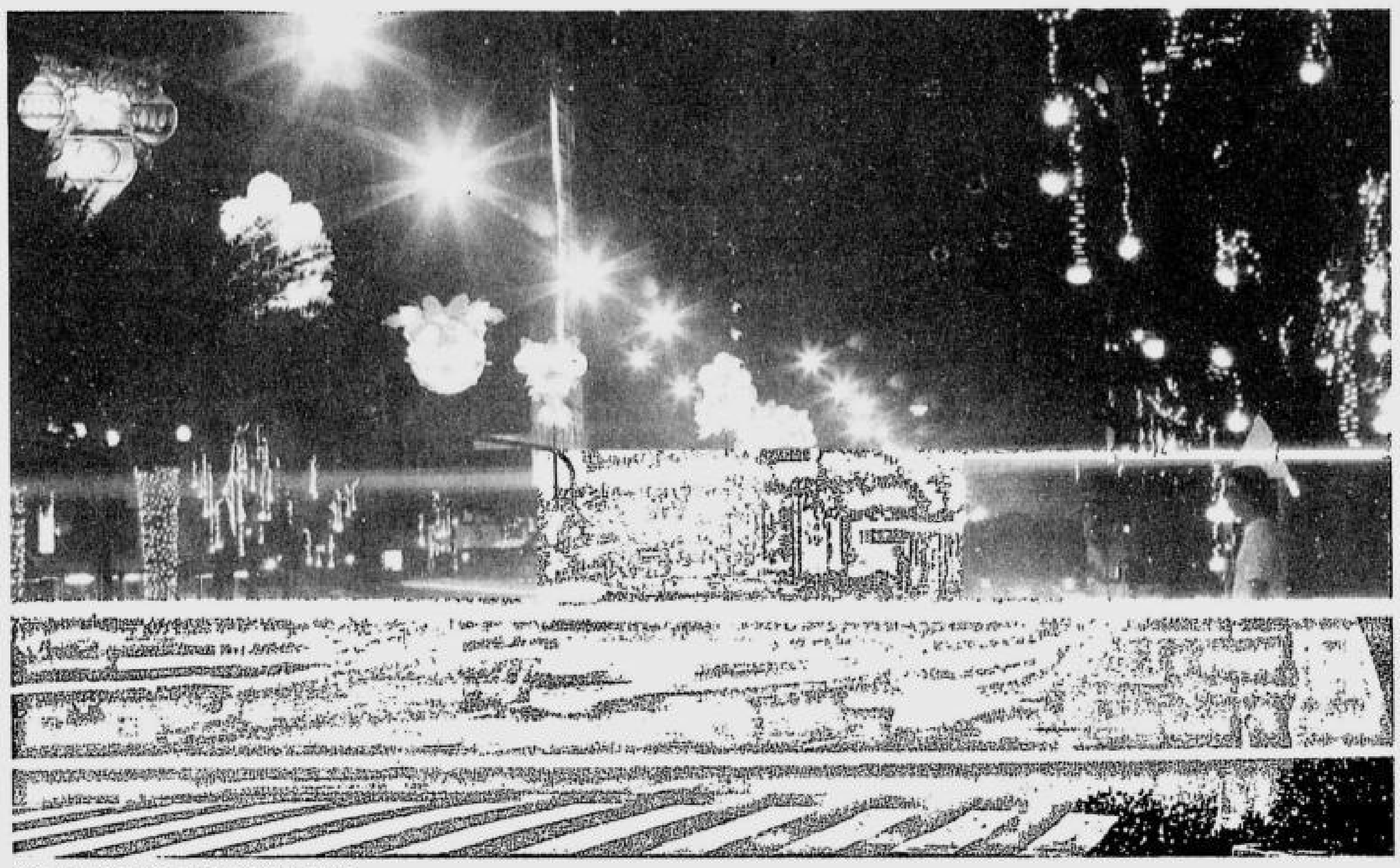
WASHINGTON—PRESIDENT George W. Bush, who had contended that the United States was winning the war in Iraq, said for the first time that American forces were not winning there. He also said the military would be expanded to fight a long-term battle against terrorism.

Bush did not say on Tuesday the United States was losing the war, which began in March 2003 and has cost the lives of nearly 3,000 troops.

Instead, when asked during an interview with The Washington Post whether the war was being won, the president borrowed the phrasing of Marine Gen. Peter Pace, chair of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff.

"You know, I think an interesting construct that General Pace uses is, 'We're not winning, we're not losing.' There's been some very positive developments. And you take a step back and look at progress in Iraq, you say, well, it's

US NOT WINNING/ A8



BRIGHT LIGHTS, BIG CITY
Twinkle lights hanging from trees, lampposts bursting with colorful lanterns, cars whizzing by in the Christmas rush. With lights up and blinking on Ayala Avenue in Makati City, Christmas is definitely just around the corner. EDWIN BACASMAS

RP, US sign 'agreement' on custody of Smith

By Christine O. Avendaño

MALACAÑANG IS HOPEFUL that the Court of Appeals will eventually decide to transfer custody of convicted rapist Lance Cpl. Daniel Smith to US authorities.

Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita yesterday said Solicitor General Antonio Eduardo Nachura had submitted to the appellate court an "agreement" between Manila and Washington manifesting their desire for the American Marine to be returned to US custody in keeping with provisions of the RP-US Visiting Forces Agreement.

The manifestation was signed by Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo and US Ambassador Kristie Kenney.

"We are hoping that with the submission [of the agreement] affirming the provision of the VFA, we will get a favorable consideration from the [court]," Ermita told reporters at his weekly news conference.

Ermita also endorsed to reporters a statement made by Sen. Miriam Defensor-Santiago on her "insights" on the matter of Smith's custody.

According to Santiago, a staunch ally of President Macapagal-Arroyo, Smith should be re-

RP, US SIGN/ A8

2nd petition on people's initiative readied

By Gil C. Cabacungan Jr., Michael Lim Ubac and TJ Burgonio

APPARENTLY SPURRED BY PRESIDENT Macapagal-Arroyo's declaration of her resolve to push Charter change (Cha-cha), the Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines (Ulap) is rushing to file a second petition with the Commission on Elections to amend the 1987 Constitution through a people's initiative.

Eastern Samar Gov. and Ulap spokesperson Ben Evardone said the second petition would be "simple and more appealing" to the public as it would push for a presidential-unicameral system instead of a parliamentary form of government. The first petition was dismissed by the Supreme Court less than two months ago.

Evardone said Ulap would convene no later than the first week of January to finalize the second petition, with an eye to gathering the mandatory signatures within a week.

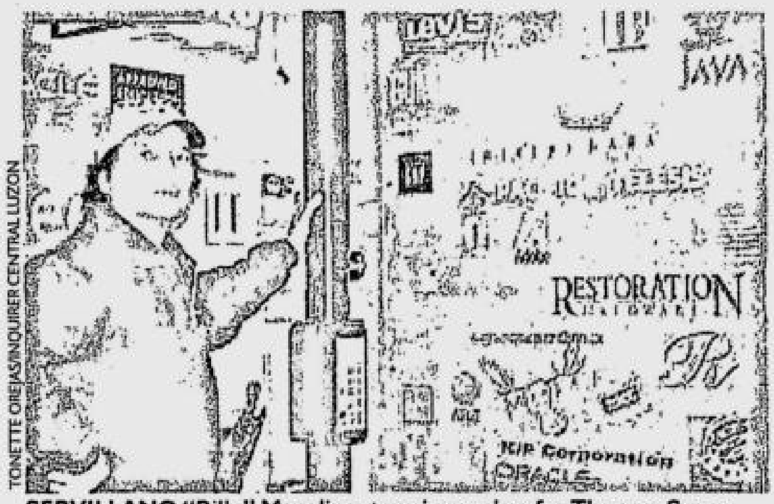
"We're supposed to be tackling the matter now but with all these [holiday] parties going on, it's hard to get a quorum," he said in a phone interview.

"If ever, the plebiscite can be held simultaneously with the May 14 polls," he added.

At the House of Representa-

2ND PETITION/ A6

Grade 2 dropout now 'The Master' in US



TONETTE OREJAS/INQUIRER CENTRAL LUZON

SERVILLANO "Billy" Macalino, top sign maker for Thomas-Swan Sign Co. in San Francisco, and some of his team's works on display.

By Tonette Orejas
Inquirer Central Luzon

SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA—Servillano "Billy" Macalino calls himself "*Pinoy na naligaw sa Amerika na ganito ang trabaho* (a Filipino who wandered off to America doing this kind of job)."

Although he describes himself in jest as "no read, no write," his American coworkers at the Thomas-Swan Sign Co. Inc. in this city call him "The Master."

That's because Macalino, who has been with the company for 32 years now, leads the team that executes designs for some of the most prominent signs in the United States and other parts of the globe. The 59-year-old also heads the "trauma section" that handles repair.

Thomas-Swan, according to its website, boasts the following clients—Skidmore Owings and Merril, Vanderbyl Design, Primo Angeli, Bedford Properties, Fisher Development, Grosvenor International, JMB Properties, Trammel Crow Residential, the San Francisco Fashion Center, the San Francisco Moscone Convention Center and other redevelopment projects for the cities of San Jose and San Rafael in California.

The firm, established in 1877,

GRADE 2/ A8

PNP chief deploys elite force to Abra

By Alcuin Papa

DIRECTOR GENERAL OSCAR Calderon of the Philippine National Police yesterday announced the formation of a task force and the deployment of an elite team in Abra to prevent an upsurge of violence following the murder of Abra Rep. Luis Bersamin Jr.

The PNP chief also said he was considering replacing policemen in the politically volatile province, particularly those identified with politicians.

Calderon said Task Force Abra, headed by Senior Supt. Eugene Martin, would assess the peace and order situation in the area in the run-up to the May 2007 election. Martin is deputy chief for operations of the PNP Cordillera region command.

"Task Force Abra is about security of Abra province from insurgency, criminality and all private armed groups," he said.

Calderon said the task force was still "validating the effectiveness" of the police in Abra to determine if there was a need to replace them with policemen from

PNP CHIEF/ A6

Strict enforcement of gun ban vowed

By Jerome Aning and Alcuin Papa

AMID FEARS OF AN UPsurge of political violence, Commission on Elections Chair Benjamin Abalos yesterday announced that the Comelec would strictly implement the firearms ban during the coming election period.

"Only law enforcers such as the police as well as the military will be allowed to carry guns during the election period from Jan. 14 to June 13," Abalos told reporters.

"We won't even give exemptions to private bodyguards," he told reporters.

The Comelec will be stringent in enforcing the firearms ban and work not just for the filing of charges

STRICT/ A6

Colonel puts relief work ahead of family

By Juan Escandor Jr.
Inquirer Southern Luzon

LEGAZPI CITY—THE RESILIENCY of the Bicolanos has inspired Col. Roberto Morales, commander of Task Force Alpha (TFA), the rescue and retrieval team of the Army.

Amid so much death and destruction, the Bicolanos were able to pick up the pieces of their lives and were trying to make the best of an abnormal situation.

"When we arrived in Padang, I was amazed to see that the victims of Supertyphoon 'Reming' were helping each other. I met this foreigner who told me that in their country, looting ensues after a disaster," Morales said.

Padang is a village in Legazpi City where whole neighborhoods were wiped out by volcanic deposits. At least 62 people died and 163 were missing after Reming left Albay.

The TFA is the first government rescue and retrieval team that was able to penetrate isolated areas in Legazpi and the towns of Daraga and Sto. Domingo the morning after Reming.

Morales is not only doing his best for the Bicolanos, he has decided not to go home this Christmas.

"Considering what the typhoon victims are going through now, spending Christmas far from my family is no big deal to me. The Bicolanos inspire me to do my best—this is my way of sharing what I have," he told the INQUIRER during an interview at the headquarters here.

When Mayon Volcano erupted in August, Morales had seen the

ALBAY/ A6

WEATHER FORECAST

FORECAST: Southern Luzon and Visayas will continue to have cloudy skies with scattered rainshowers becoming widespread rains over Samar provinces and Bicol region. The Eastern sections of Northern and Central Luzon will become cloudy with rains. The rest of the country will be cloudy with isolated rainshowers.

COMPILED BY: KATE PEDROSO, INQUIRER RESEARCH/12/20/06 SOURCE: PAGASA

Metro Manila	Partly Cloudy	Iloilo/Bacolod	Cloudy with Rains
Baguio	Partly Cloudy	Roxas	Cloudy with Rains
Tuguegarao	Partly Cloudy	Cebu	Cloudy with Rains
Laoag	Partly Cloudy	Tacloban	Cloudy with Rains
Clark Zone	Partly Cloudy	Gen. Santos	Partly Cloudy
Tagaytay	Partly Cloudy	Zamboanga	Partly Cloudy
Legazpi	Cloudy with Rains	Cagayan de Oro	Partly Cloudy
Calapan	Cloudy with Rains	Davao	Partly Cloudy

Second FRONTPAGE

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P3B sought for repair of classrooms

By TJ Burgonio and Mike Ubac

THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION IS GIVING Congress a free hand to decide whether to realign the P4.7-billion fund for its food for school program to close the gaps in classrooms and teachers, but badly needs P3 billion to repair classrooms damaged by a series of typhoons.

A deadlock on the proper allocation of the fund led both the Senate and House to suspend indefinitely a bicameral conference committee meeting on next year's budget, dashing hopes for the approval of the P1.126 trillion 2007 budget before the yearend.

"*Wala na* (It's gone)," said Albay Rep. Joey Salceda as he confirmed that Malacañang was bracing for a reenacted budget next year, after last-minute back-door negotiations bogged down.

Both chambers of Congress were set to adjourn last night for a month-long holiday break without ratifying the budget.

Failure to enact a national budget by Dec. 31 of the year will force the Palace to fund priority programs next year through the existing national budget.

So by Jan. 1, 2007, the Arroyo administration will operate again on a rolled-over budget of P907.56-billion, the same one spent in 2005 and 2006.

Salceda was in no mood to explain the implications of yet another rolled-over budget for next year.

"It's up to them," he said when asked if there was a chance the bicameral conference committee could finally agree on the budget.

Education Secretary Jesli Lapus, who was just confirmed by the Commission on Appointments, said his department badly needed the money to repair classrooms.

The House wants the P4.7 billion retained as originally proposed by Malacañang, but the Senate insisted that these be realigned to fund the construction of 8,000 more classrooms and the hiring of 6,000 additional teachers.

Lapus said the school feeding program seen as crucial to arresting hunger and poverty in the countryside should not be scuttled, but at the same time, acknowledged that the school building program was a top priority.

"I don't believe these two are mutually exclusive," he told reporters.

He said the department's immediate concern was repairing the classrooms damaged by the series of typhoons.

"If they can give me calamity funds for that, it's OK with me whatever they want to do with the school feeding program. If they don't give us those calamity funds, where will we get the repair money?" he said.

Classes of some 800,000 schoolchildren around the country have been disrupted when their classrooms were either damaged or destroyed by the typhoons.

For 2007, the DepEd has asked for a budget of P134 billion, the bulk of which goes to the payment of salaries of teachers and personnel.

To break the deadlock, Senate President Manuel Villar Jr. proposed that both panels agree on a reasonable amount to fund the school feeding program in view of senators' fears this could be diverted for political purposes in the run-up to next year's elections.

"The senators have suspicions that this might just be another source of scam because this involves a big amount. So if they agree on a reasonable amount and how this program will be implemented without getting tainted with politics, this could be approved," he said.

Villar, however, said that he and his colleagues were now resigned to the fact that the earliest the budget would be passed was the third week of January.

"By January, that issue will be resolved. We have a huge budget, and that is just one item that both panels can't agree on," he said.

Sen. Franklin Drilon, chair of the Senate panel and committee on finance, agreed. "I don't think there is any serious prejudice. This is the only issue left and we are almost sure that when we open or before the end of January next year, we should have a new budget in place," he said.

Likening the budget deadlock to a refrain of an old song, House Majority Leader Prospero Nograles said: "Maybe this year, maybe next year, maybe never."

But he said he hoped that it was not the "end of the road for the budget."

"We will get there sooner than later," he said.

EDUCATION Secretary Jesli Lapus stands as his confirmation by the Commission on Appointments is read during a plenary session. The appointments of 11 other members of the Cabinet, however, were deemed bypassed after the CA failed to act on them. ROGER MARGALLO

CA confirms Lapus, bypasses 11 other Cabinet men

By TJ Burgonio

EDUCATION SECRETARY JESLI Lapus yesterday breezed through his confirmation at the Commission on Appointments, but 11 others appointed by President Macapagal-Arroyo to her Cabinet were not as lucky.

The CA sub-committee on education, composed mostly of his former colleagues at the House of Representatives, approved Lapus' nomination and recommended its approval in plenary without asking a single question.

After the lone opponent failed to appear, Surigao del Sur Rep. Prospero Pichay, CA vice chair, immediately moved that the secretary's appointment be approved. Lanao del Norte Rep. Abdullah Dimaporo seconded the motion. The proceeding was over in a few minutes.

Lapus, who was serving as Tarlac congressman when he was plucked by the President to head the Department of Education months ago, wasn't surprised by his swift confirmation.

"I am no stranger to anybody in this panel. They know my background. They know my professional management background. So it was not difficult for them," he told reporters, referring to his former colleagues.

Besides, he said he believed that his track record as former president of the Land Bank of the Philippines, and former chair of the House committee on ways and means had helped him bag his confirmation.

"I've been on the job five months, so I suppose it is an expression of confidence on my total background as a professional executive and as a legislator in the last three terms. I was chairman of the committee on ways and means," he said.

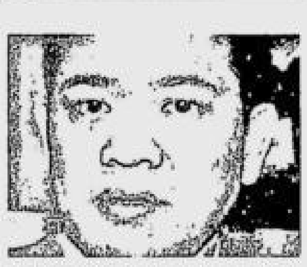
Lapus' nomination, Shirley Ho-Vicario appointment as ambassador to Papua New Guinea, and the appointments to a higher rank of 51 military officers, including 19 generals, were approved during the plenary session.

Eleven other Cabinet members were deemed bypassed because their nominations were not approved by the body on its last day of session yesterday.

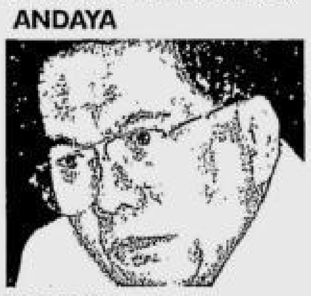
They were Rolando Andaya of budget, Esperanza Cabral of social welfare, Francisco Duque III of health, Hermogenes Ebdane of public works, Peter Favila of trade, Raul Gonzalez of justice, Raphael Lotilla of energy, Ronaldo Puno of local government, Angelo Reyes of environment, Margarito Teves of finance, and Romulo Neri of the National Economic Development Authority.

"They have to be nominated again by the President," Senate President Manuel Villar Jr., CA chair, said.

BYPASSED



ANDAYA



EBDANE

Budget Secretary Rolando Andaya, Social Welfare Secretary Esperanza Cabral, Health Secretary Francisco Duque III, Public Works Secretary Hermogenes Ebdane, Trade Secretary Peter Favila, Energy Secretary Raphael Lotilla, Interior and Local Government Secretary Ronaldo Puno, Environment Secretary Angelo Reyes, Finance Secretary Margarito Teves, Economic Planning Secretary Romulo Neri

Filipino drug courier nabbed in Bolivia

By Volt Contreras

AFTER TRAVELING ACROSS seven countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, a Filipino woman has been arrested in Bolivia for allegedly serving as a courier of illegal drugs, the Department of Foreign Affairs reported yesterday.

The woman, whose identity was withheld, was caught carrying two kilograms of cocaine paste on a bus heading for Sta. Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia's commercial center.

While still in Manila, she had been promised a job as a fruit picker in Australia, the DFA said, quoting her case record. Her unidentified recruiter first made her fly to Bangkok, where she was met by "African traffickers" instead.

After spending a few days in the Thai capital, she was ordered to proceed to South America via Hong Kong and then Johannesburg.

"She then entered South America through Lima, Peru and traveled to Sao Paolo, Brazil, where she was instructed to wait for a few days," the DFA said.

Recurring pattern

The woman got further instructions to go to Guayaquil, Ecuador, and then to Cochabamba, Bolivia, where she was given a duffel bag containing the cocaine paste. She was en route to a "contact" in Sta. Cruz de la Sierra when arrested by police.

The woman, whom the Philippine honorary consul in La Paz had provided with local attorneys, could face imprisonment of up to 25 years if convicted.

It was not immediately known how she managed to cross borders with apparent ease. By her account, the DFA said, "there are many Filipinas waiting in Bangkok for their turn to carry drugs."

The department said a number of Filipino women have landed in jails in Argentina and Bolivia in recent years because of this "recurring pattern" of recruitment by "regional drug lords."

Palace confident budget would be passed on time

By Gil Cabacungan

ERMITA

MALACAÑANG REMAINS CONfident that Congress would pass the proposed P1.26 trillion 2007 budget amid reports that President Macapagal-Arroyo has maintained a hard-line position to restore the budget cuts initiated by the Senate.

Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita warned that the failure to pass the 2007 budget would haunt the lawmakers who would run for reelection in the May elections next year.

"With several months before the elections, members of both houses of Congress would not wish to be known as setting back on the passage of the national budget that would cause the national government to use the reenacted budget of 2005. It will be a blot on the efforts of both houses of Congress to have money for projects of government especially in the elections. Its a bad election campaign for them if the budget is not passed again in 2007. They will see through that," said Ermita in a briefing.

Albay Rep. Joey Salceda reported that the bicameral conference committee remained deadlocked on the 2007 budget making it more likely that the government would operate on a reenacted budget at least in the first few months next year.

The committee came close to an agreement a few days ago with the realignment of P6 billion in the budget but the President reportedly vetoed these amendments. Salceda said the earliest the budget would be approved was February.

"I am optimistic that somehow the budget for 2007 will be passed. Its just a matter of time before the bicameral committee approves it," said Ermita in a briefing.

Ermita said the budget deadlock has come down to mere differences in opinion particularly in the P4.7 billion school feeding programs which the Senate slashed. "There must be a way to get that program somehow and they will see though it. I hope that their thoughts are not clouded by all this talk that this is an election gimmick," said Ermita.

"The budget is a key component of economic takeoff and we remain confident that Congress will reach a timely consensus to push our common vision forward," said Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye in a statement.

Marine faces court-martial for distributing Erap film

THE ARMED FORCES WILL court-martial a Marine officer who distributed copies of a banned biographical film about deposed leader Joseph Estrada, according to military spokesperson.

Marine Lt. Artemio Raymundo will be tried by a military court for distributing copies of the film, the military spokesperson, Lt. Col. Ariel Caculitan, said yesterday.

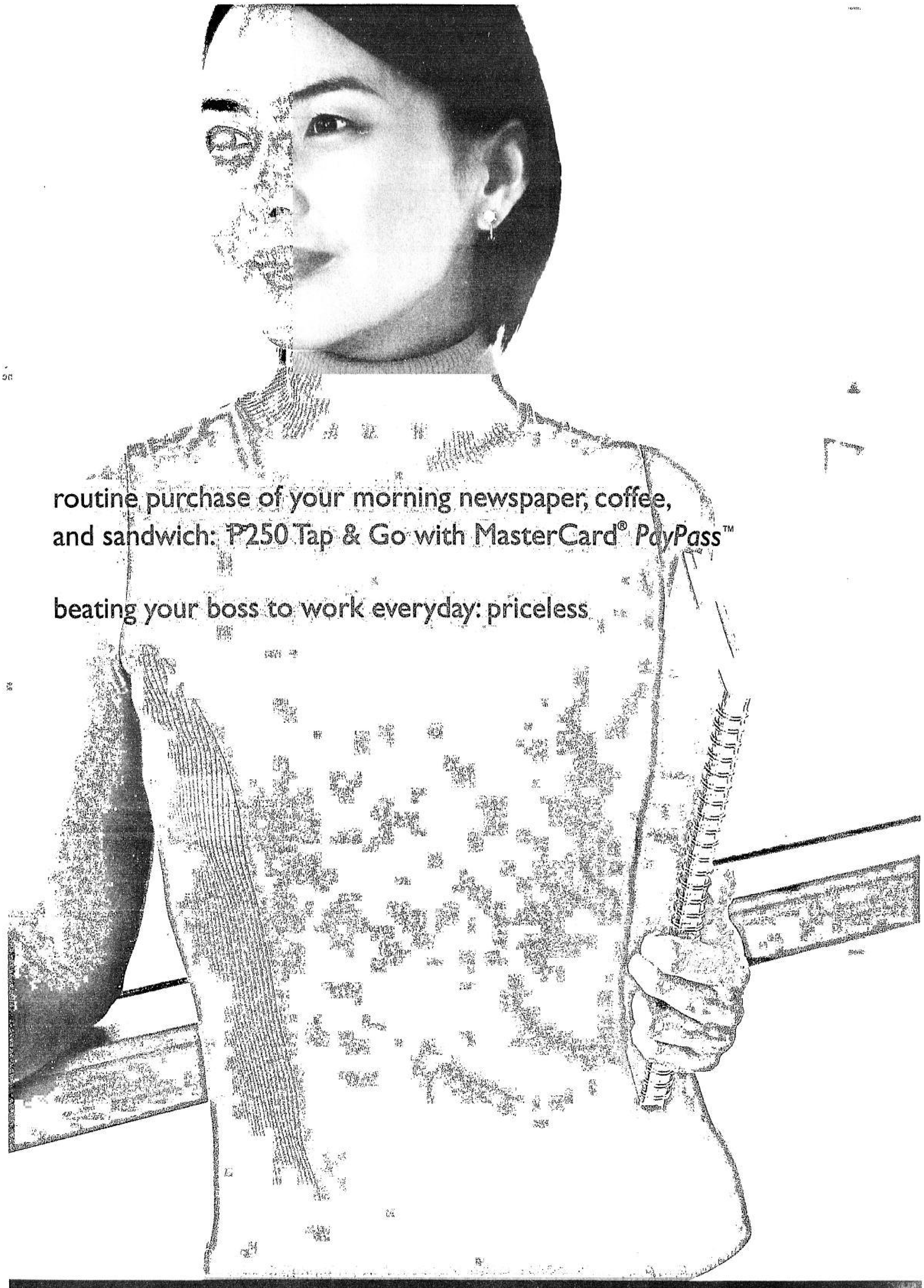
The film, "To Live for the Masses," traces Estrada's rise from movie star, San Juan mayor, and senator to president who was elected by a landslide in 1998. It ends with his ouster in 2001 in the face of corruption charges.

The Arroyo administration has banned the film over fears that it could lead to instability. The film contends that the powerful Philippine Catholic Church conspired with big business to topple Estrada illegally. Ms Arroyo, then the Vice President, replaced Estrada.

Ms Arroyo, however, has suffered low popularity ratings following allegations she cheated to win reelection in May 2004.

Several military officers are currently facing charges in connection with an alleged coup against Ms Arroyo in February. *AFP*

FORMER President Estrada, hounded by a plunder case, kisses his mother during a recent visit in his mother's house in Greenhills. RAFFY LERMA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El Niño seen cause of warm Yule temperature

By Lawrence de Guzman
Inquirer Research

WONDERING WHY IT'S WARM when it's supposed to be cold? Blame it on El Niño.

"The unusual warm temperature these days is [caused by] a mild El Niño phenomenon in the country. We expect it to last until the first quarter of 2007," said Dr. Bernardo Soriano Jr., chief of the Atmospheric, Geophysical and Space Sciences branch of the weather bureau Pagasa.

El Niño refers to an abnormal warming of sea temperatures that affect weather patterns, bringing drought in some regions of the Pacific and heavy rains in others.

In the latest El Niño update of the World Meteorological Organization, the sea temperature across the central and eastern equatorial Pacific has been observed at about 1 to 1.5 degrees Celsius warmer than usual since October.

This prompted Pagasa to issue an advisory early this month warning the public of generally warmer than normal air temperatures in most parts of the country.

In Luzon, the bureau predicts the ranges of temperature to be 20 to 32 degrees Celsius over the lowlands and 14 to 23 degrees over the mountainous regions, and 23 to 31 degrees in the Visayas.

In Mindanao, it predicts 22 to 33 degrees over the lowlands and 18 to 28 degrees over the mountainous areas.

Baguio weather

In December 2003, a cold spell hit Baguio City when the mercury fell to 9.2 degrees Celsius, according to Pagasa. In December 2004 and 2005, the city recorded 10.4 degrees.

But this year, Pagasa predicts that the temperature in Baguio will barely go below 14.4 degrees because of El Niño.

"Even without the thermometer, the unusually warm temperature is very much felt these days," said Soriano.

Jose Froilan of Parañaque City complained that unlike in past holiday seasons, the temperature was warm even at night.

"It's as if it's not Christmas," he said adding that he had to keep the electric fan on to ensure sound sleep.

Also unlike previous holidays, most of the faithful attending this year's *Misa de Gallo,* the traditional dawn Masses, feel no need to wear jackets.

"It's not that cold. You'll see people in sleeveless shirts and shorts at the dawn Masses," said Rod Alenton of Sampaloc, Manila.

Abnormal rainfall

Pagasa also attributes abnormalities in rainfall conditions to El Niño.

Last month, for example, 70 percent of the Philippines had below-normal rainfall conditions, particularly over northeastern Luzon, Southern Luzon, Visayas and most parts of Mindanao.

But above-normal rainfall conditions were observed over western Luzon, the Bicol region, Mindoro, Marinduque and Romblon, mainly because of recent typhoons.

On Nov. 30, when Supertyphoon "Reming" lashed Bicol, Legazpi City in Albay also recorded 466 millimeters of rain—its highest in 40 years.

Asked to situate the current phenomenon in the context of global warming, Soriano said that while more data had to be analyzed and verified, the climate had indeed become more unpredictable.

"We have observed that El Niño has become more frequent in the past years. And it's hard to discount global warming," said Soriano.

"The thing is, climate is a long and slow phenomenon. To positively affect the climate, a holistic and consistent intervention is necessary by reducing our emission of gases and planting more trees," he said.

Bright Christmas Day

But those areas experiencing rains will brighten up in time for Christmas Day, according to Nathaniel Cruz, chief of Pagasa's weather branch.

"The rains over the Bicol region and the Visayas will perhaps last until [today]. By Friday, the low-pressure area [east of the Bicol region] will no longer be, and the frontal system shall have moved toward extreme northern Luzon," he said yesterday.

Cruz said the low-pressure area, the cold front and the northeasterly winds were the factors causing the rains over Bicol and eastern Visayas.

He said other parts of Luzon, including the National Capital Region, and the Visayas that were experiencing dry and cool conditions would continue to enjoy good weather.

Fair conditions

Metro Manila will continue to have dry weather as the northeast monsoon brings little rain and this usually falls over the eastern seaboard, Cruz said.

He said Pagasa had come up with a 5-day weather outlook forecasting fair conditions for almost the entire archipelago starting Friday until Christmas Day.

"There is no weather disturbance that's threatening the Philippine area of responsibility. There is also no brewing storm in the equatorial Pacific area. So we don't expect any storm over Christmas," Cruz said.

A MAN sits in front of the gates of the City Museum in Dagupan apparently attracted by the bright lights inside. Bangus-shaped decorations are hung inside the museum. RAY ZAMBRANO/INQUIRER NORTHERN LUZON

Coast Guard braces for rush of passengers

By Leila B. Salaverria

THE PHILIPPINE COAST GUARD has warned travelers going home for Christmas to expect a crush of passengers at the seaports this weekend.

PCG personnel have been placed under heightened alert for the influx of travelers, mostly students and workers, at the terminals.

Because of tight security procedures, passengers should check in two hours before their scheduled departure, said PCG spokesperson Lt. Cmdr. Joseph Coyme.

Coyme also advised travelers to secure their tickets before they go to the ports. Despite the annual Christmas rush, travelers still buy their tickets just before departure, causing confusion and chaos.

"As much as possible, they should be ready with everything they need before going to the terminals to avoid inconveniences and to ensure that their trip would start smoothly," he said.

Passengers should also listen to announcements to see if the weather conditions would lead to the cancelation of their trips. The PCG usually gives out travel advisories when storm warning signals are raised.

Knives and guns banned

Coyme said bladed weapons, pyrotechnics, firearms and explosives were not allowed to be carried aboard ships.

"It would save them a lot of hassle if they refrain from bringing these items," he said.

He also reminded the agency's personnel as well as sea vessel operators and passengers to be vigilant against overloading.

Though many people want to go home to their families and loved ones for Christmas, this should be no reason for them to crowd sea vessels and endanger people's lives, he said.

Coyme said PCG personnel and ship operators should see to it that vessels were only loaded within their capacity. Passengers should not insist on boarding sea vessels if these are already filled to capacity, he said.

He said that while overloading was hardly a problem at major ports where personnel of various maritime agencies were on hand to enforce the rules, the PCG was concerned about tertiary ports.

Coyme said these tertiary ports, which are used by small and light vessels, lacked basic infrastructure.

"These are usually makeshift ports that are hard to control. There are no facilities and no permanent maritime officers stationed there," he said.

Airport exec says noise makes Xmas livelier

By Nikko Dizon

THE AIRPORT AUTHORITY APpears cool to the idea of turning the country's premier airport into a "silent airport."

The airlines' year-old proposal to minimize what they have described as "unnecessary noise" at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (Naia) is still being evaluated, Robert Uy, head executive assistant of the airport authority general manager, said yesterday.

"We've had informal talks. We're not saying we're not going to do it but there are factors to consider," Uy said in a phone interview.

Uy said Filipino culture, as well as the layout of the Naia 1 itself, are among the primary considerations whether or not the silent airport concept is applicable at the terminal.

Uy noted that Filipino air travelers flying out are used to hearing their flights being announced.

Without the paging system, he said, a lot of passengers could be left behind.

Uy added that the silent airport concept does not appear suitable to the design of Naia 1.

"The terminal was built decades ago and was not designed for this concept. You could get lost finding your way to the gates," Uy said.

The official added that the silent airport concept could be more suitable for the Naia 3 which has a more passenger-friendly design.

Moreover, Uy said that Christmas without the piped in carols is like veering away from the Filipino way of celebrating the holidays.

"*Ang* Christmas *sa atin masaya pag may ingay* (Christmas is fun with the noise)," he said.

Uy added that Ati-Atihan dancers and a chorale group performed at the arrival area of Naia 1 during the presidential *salubong* for Filipino workers last Monday in keeping with tradition.

"How can we be festive without these lively sounds?" he said.

In their proposal to the airport authority, the Airline Operators Council (AOC) had pointed out that flying could be stressful for several passengers, and that having a "silent airport" would help them rest and relax while waiting for their flights, or upon arriving.

Aside from the piped in Christmas carols, the Miaa's holiday raffle promo is being announced three times per arriving flight since this month, on top of the announcements of flight information details, as well as lost baggage, and airport reminders, among others.

PRESIDENT Macapagal Arroyo takes time out to greet policemen as part of her holiday routine. MALACAÑANG PHOTO

MERRY ang pasko ni
GLORIA at mga Elitista,
KRISIS ANG SA
MASA!
FDC - PATTAK
LABAN NG MASA
MEMBERS of urban poor groups display lanterns with their Christmas messages. REM ZAMORA

NUJP launches '20 steps to safety' campaign

THE NATIONAL UNION OF Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) on Tuesday launched its "20 Steps to Safety" campaign and the Media Guide on HIV/AIDS Reporting at the Newsdesk Café in Quezon City. Simultaneous launchings were also held in Subic and Iloilo City.

"While they may seem unrelated, both actually address very important issues that journalists should be concerned with—journalists' safety and accurate and sensitive reporting," NUJP chair Jose Torres Jr. said in a statement.

With the number of Filipino journalists being killed each year, safety training and awareness is a must to keep journalists safe and alive, the group said.

During the launch, the Media Safety Office of the NUJP and International Federation of Journalists presented the poster and reporter's notebook that contain what it calls "20 Steps to Safety." These are practical tips and information for journalists facing threats or covering sensitive issues or dangerous areas.

NUJP has recorded 84 media killings since 1986, 47 under the administration of President Macapagal-Arroyo and 11 this year.

The reporters' notebook and poster are available at the IFJ-NUJP Media Safety Office. Local NUJP chapters may also be contacted for copies.

The Media Guide for HIV/AIDS Reporting contains useful information for journalists that would help them in their coverage of HIV/AIDS cases and related issues.

Corrections

IN THE DEC. 18 ISSUE, Recah Trinidad's "Bare Eye" column on Page A30 of the Sports section—"Thailand, 12 golds, sets a record in cruelty"—misstated the number of medals that Thailand won at the 15th Asian Games in Doha. Thailand won a total of 13—not 12—gold medals.

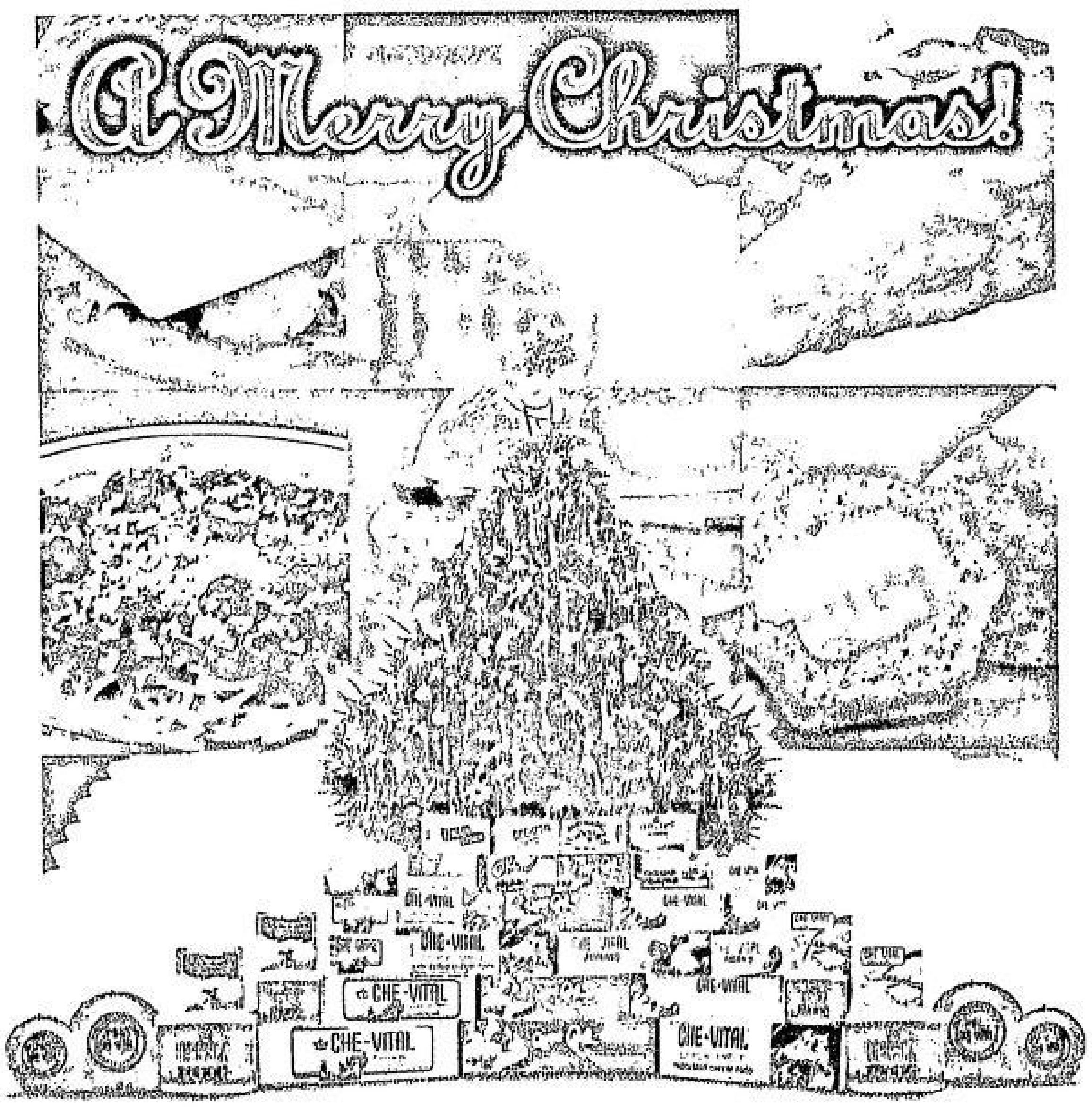
* * *

IN THE DEC. 19 ISSUE, a front-page story—"Fresh Cha-cha push seen after Christmas"—misstated the diocese of Bishop Antonio Tobias. Tobias is the bishop of Novaliches—not Navotas. Navotas is part of the diocese of Caloocan, which is headed by Bishop Deogracias Iñiguez.

* * *

Readers may send their requests for correction of factual errors in writing to the Day Desk, Philippine Daily Inquirer, PDI Building, Chino Roces Avenue corner Mascardo Street, Makati City, fax Nos. 897-47-93/94; e-mail address: daydesk@inquirer.com.ph.

Complaints about lack of fairness or objectivity may be sent to Lorna Kalaw Tirol, readers' advocate, e-mail address: readersadvocate@inquirer.com. ph or fax Nos. 897-47-93/94, Attn: Readers Advocate. Her phone number is 897-8808 Local 342.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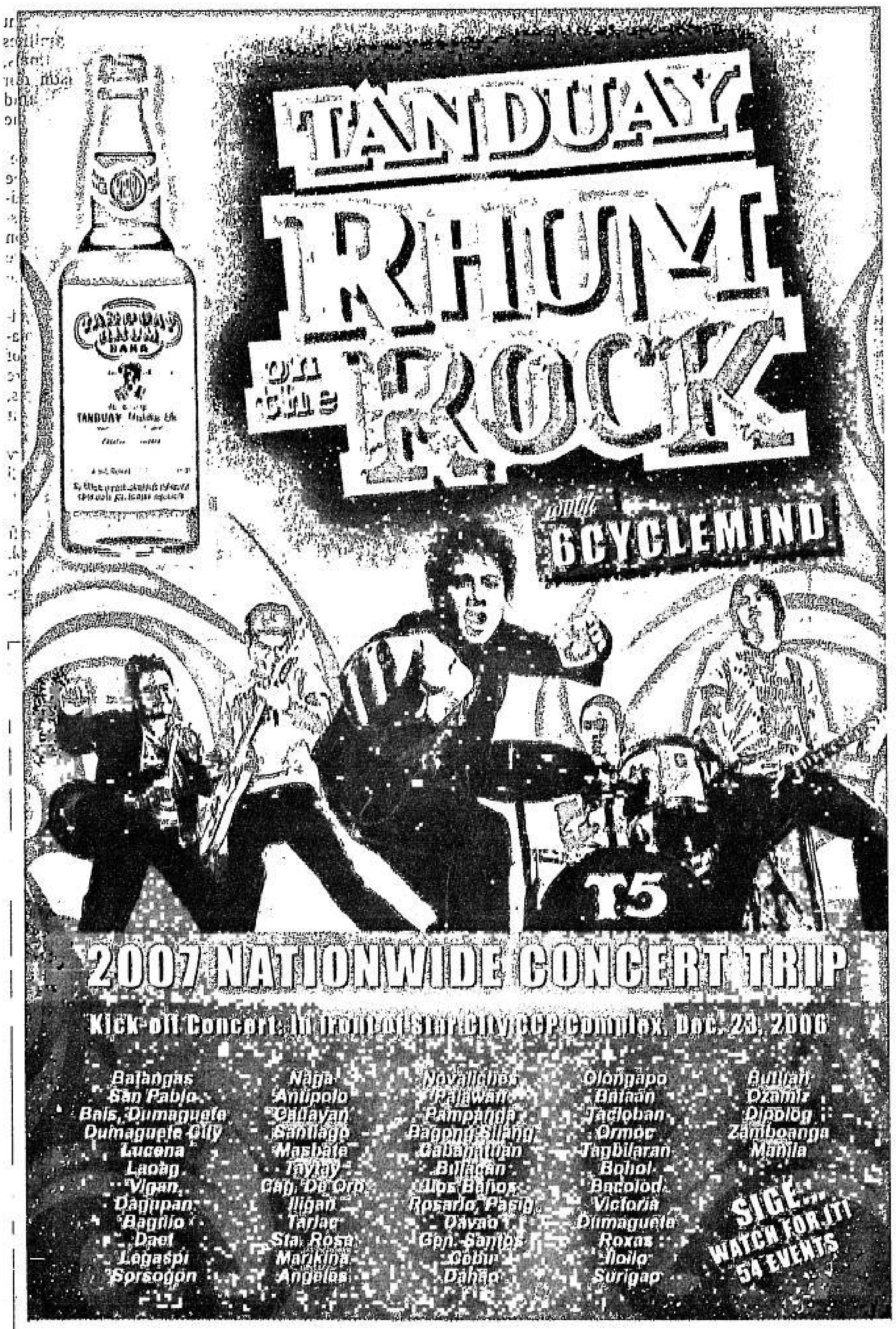
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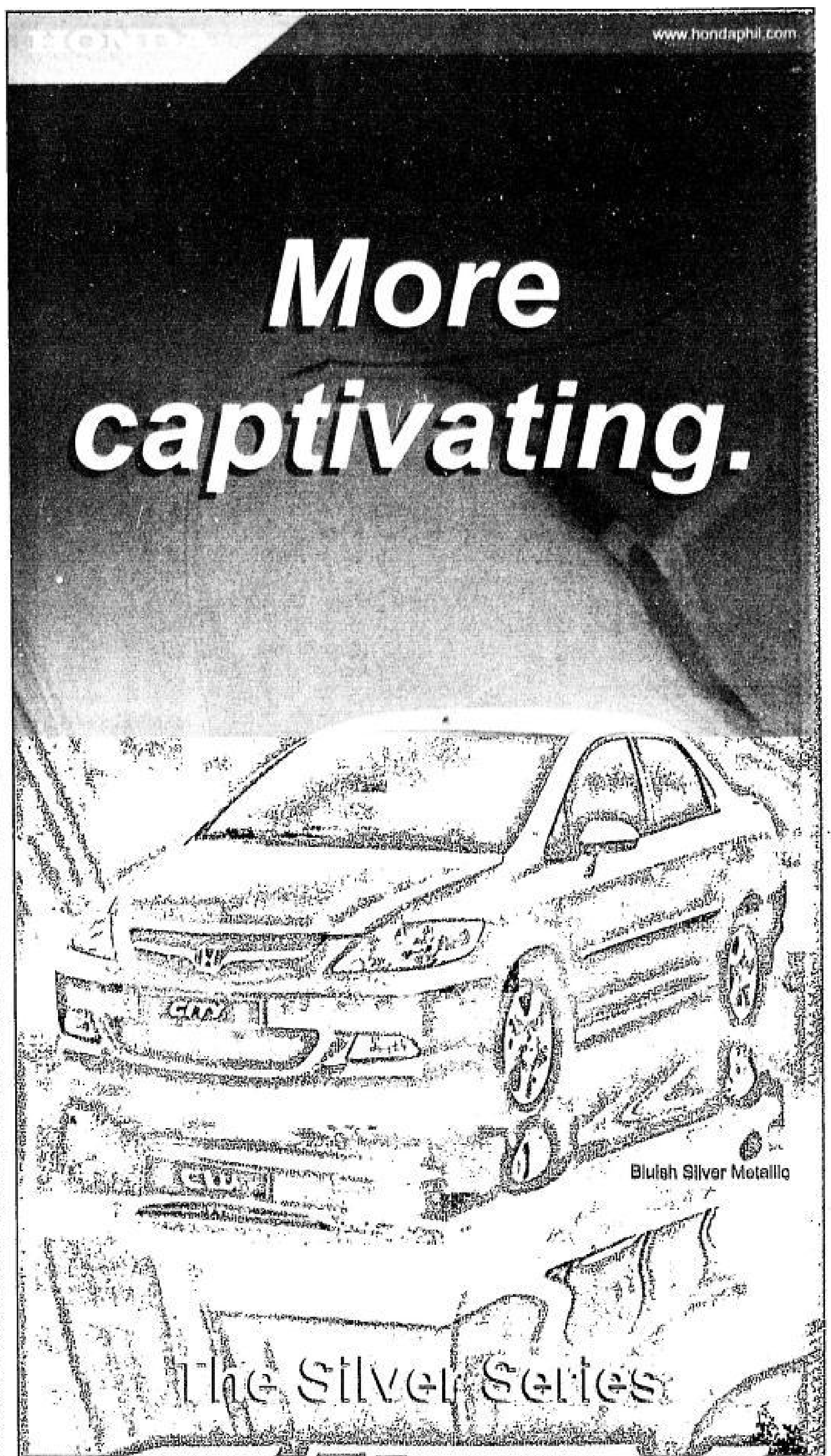
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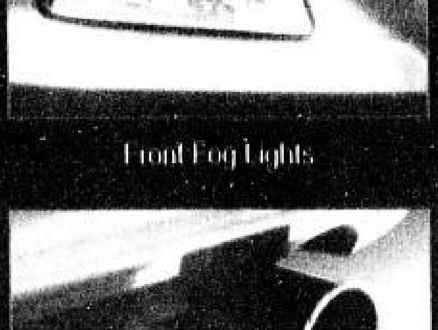
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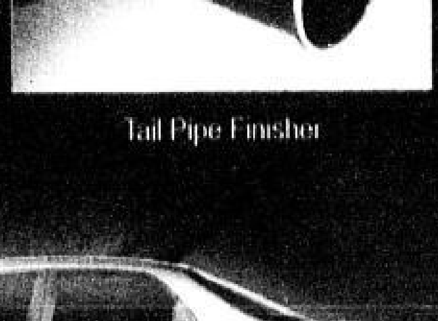
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Colonel puts relief work ahead of family

From page A1

aftermath firsthand. He was then the deputy commander of Task Force Mayon. And then Reming happened.

"Maybe they are so used to this kind of situation. They are risking their lives, but they keep going back to the danger areas to gather their belongings and bring them to their families in the evacuation centers. They even manage to smile," the colonel said.

He said there were women weaving inside the evacuation centers and many others eking out a living by doing odd jobs.

He sees dead people

Since Dec. 1, Morales has seen piles of human bodies exhumed from the rubble. The deadly combination of floodwaters, volcanic sands and boulders had obliterated everything in its path.

He admitted that he was not bothered by the sight. What he found disturbing was the suffering of survivors who have lost their loved ones.

"I can only empathize and try to understand what they're going through," he said.

Big rocks

Morales said he would make sure the soldiers under his command would be rotated from retrieval work (of dead bodies) to other activities such as disaster response, road clearing and relief distribution. This would serve to lessen the trauma of handling hundreds of bodies, he said.

Six days before Christmas, Morales said bodies were still being retrieved from volcanic deposits that cascaded from the slopes of Mayon when it erupted on Nov. 30.

Although the focus of the TFA's operation had shifted to relief operation, he said requests from relatives of disaster victims would be accommodated whenever possible.

Sometimes, however, it was impossible to dig even with the help of heavy equipment because there just were too many volcanic rocks—the size of houses—covering the area.

NIÑO JESUS ORBETA/INQUIRER SOUTHERN LUZON

MEMBERS of the PNP Mobile Group based in Ligao City in Albay carry a body, one of hundreds recovered three days after Supertyphoon "Reming" hit Barangay Maipon in Guinobatan town.

Changed landscape

Morales said that on the eve of Nov. 30, when Reming finally left Albay, the TFA tried to respond and penetrate areas reported to have casualties.

"The landscape on the northeastern part of Legazpi had totally changed while the central business district was deep in floodwaters. It was impossible to send our men," he recalled.

Morales said the team was finally able to reach the isolated villages in the early morning of Dec. 1 and reached Padang by foot. Its members started extracting dead bodies from volcanic deposits as high as a one-story building.

He said local officials helped look for victims and where their houses used to be.

Comic relief

Morales said the TFA also facilitated the opening of roads by bringing in heavy equipment and coordinating with the Department of Public Works and Highways.

At present, the disaster response operation is inter-phasing with rehabilitation concerns. The TFA is also going around the evacuation centers in Albay, showing comedy films to victims of the disaster.

"We hope to give the victims a break from their sorrow of losing their loved ones. The Bicolanos, who have shown a strong will to live, deserve attention more than anybody this Christmas," he said.

Bishops help

Aid has been pouring into Bicol.

The United States Catholic Bishops Conference will donate $500,000 (P24 million) through its humanitarian arm, the Catholic Relief Services, according to the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines.

CRS representatives, together with people from Caritas Philippines, were set to assess rehabilitation efforts in the region.

Both agencies will continue providing victims with basic needs, such as food, potable water, medicines, clothing and blankets, according to the CBCP.

The effort was on top of that of other Catholic agencies which had distributed around 900 bags of rice, the CBCP said. One diocese alone extended help to around 4,000 families. *With a report from Christian V. Esguerra in Manila*

2nd petition on people's initiative readied

From page A1

tives, Majority Leader Prospero Nograles told the INQUIRER that he and other administration allies would "let the Christmas holiday season pass without even discussing Cha-cha."

He said reviving the debate on amending the Constitution to pave the way for the switch to the parliamentary system would be like courting disaster.

"It has divided our country already. But we will clear the air in January as our signals are getting mixed up now. Some of us are tuned on to the FM band, and the others are locked in the AM band," Nograles said.

He said Filipinos, including House members and local executives pushing Cha-cha, were not in the mood for yet another divisive political exercise during the holidays.

Lessons learned

Evardone said that despite the debacle at the Supreme Court, Ulap's belief in the urgency to amend the Constitution had not wavered, and that its resolve had been strengthened by Ms Arroyo's renewed call for Cha-cha whatever the mode.

He said that while Ulap wanted to forget the sting of its defeat in the first attempt, it was determined not to make the same mistakes.

"We've certainly learned our lessons from our first petition. That's why we are confident that we'll get the job done this time," he said.

Evardone said Ulap would now make a proposal rather than pose a question in gathering signatures to mount a people's initiative.

He said the new petition would be limited to only two proposed revisions (Article 6 and the transitory provision), compared to the multitude of provisions that the House had piled on in the first petition.

Evardone claimed that the Supreme Court decision was not a total failure because it also validated the people's initiative as a legitimate mode to change the Constitution.

In the two decisions (the original ruling on Oct. 25 and the denial of the motion for reconsideration on Nov. 21), the high court ruled that the initiative was a revision of the Constitution in violation of Article 17, Section 2, and that the petition contained more than one subject contrary to Section 10(a) of Republic Act No. 6735.

Doubly attractive

Evardone said Ulap's proposal to retain the presidential system would appease those not too keen on letting a parliament decide who should lead the country.

"We learned that most people still want to have a direct hand in choosing their leader. I think this is what turned off most of the public from our first petition," he said.

Evardone also said that by limiting the change strictly to Congress—from bicameral to unicameral—Ulap would gather more support from people who had grown weary of the legislative gridlock.

"We're making our petition doubly attractive to achieve our goals," he said.

But Senate leaders stood firm on their position that Cha-cha should be tackled after the May 2007 elections, and accused the President of deceiving the people on her stand on the issue.

"It is precisely these forked-tongue messages that confuse the people and lead to further erosion of what is left of the government's credibility," said Senate Minority Leader Aquilino Pimentel Jr.

Speaking on Tuesday at the Asian Development Bank, Ms Arroyo vowed to pursue with vigor her goal of overhauling the Constitution, but said there was a need for a consensus on "the means and timetable."

Her announcement came mere days after she indicated that this was not the right time for Cha-cha.

Appeasing proponents

Senate President Manuel Villar Jr. said he and his colleagues could discuss Cha-cha "after the elections, but not in the manner that is being proposed now, like the Senate-less constituent assembly (Con-ass) of the House or the fraudulent people's initiative."

The senators, who had bucked the House version of the Con-ass, had earlier declared that they would only agree to tackling Charter amendments through a constitutional convention (Con-con) after the midterm elections.

Villar, however, expressed the belief that the President's fresh pitch for Cha-cha was designed to appease the proponents.

"She is saying that perhaps to embolden the remaining supporters of Cha-cha," he told reporters at the session hall.

Villar voiced doubt that Ms Arroyo would vigorously push for Cha-cha at the risk of again fueling public outrage.

"She's aware that the public is outraged by this Cha-cha. And I don't think she will ignore this. The people's message was clear that we should drop Cha-cha and go ahead with the elections," he said.

Mum's the word

Malacañang yesterday clammed up on the issue.

Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita told reporters that he did not want to say anything more because the President had spoken on the matter.

"In order not to cause any complication or mixed signals, I would rather not make any comment," Ermita said.

He also declined to comment on the remark of Michael Defensor, the President's chief of staff, that pursuing Cha-cha before the midterm elections would be courting disaster.

But there was no stopping Defensor from again airing his stand.

Interviewed over dzMM radio, Defensor said he preferred that Cha-cha be taken up after the May polls so that a consensus on it could be made.

"We can still see the strong resistance of the people ... There is a need to explain it further to the people and educate them on it," he said.

He also said pushing Cha-cha earlier would be "a formula for disaster."

Defensor reiterated that the role of the Cabinet was "not to push the President into a ravine."

Asked whether Ms Arroyo was being pushed by her allies to pursue Cha-cha, he said his "prayer for our country and our President" was that this would not happen: "*Ang aking dasal para sa ating bayan at para sa ating Pangulo, huwag naman sana.*"

Adverse reactions

The President's latest remarks on Cha-cha have generated adverse reactions in Negros Occidental.

Bacolod Bishop Vicente Navarra said Ms Arroyo should clarify by which means the Constitution would be changed because "I believe the sentiment of the people is definitely against the people's initiative and the Con-ass."

Navarra also cited the importance of timing, saying that "if the President opts for a constitutional convention, when does she want it held?"

He said he would oppose Cha-cha through a constitutional convention if Ms Arroyo would schedule the elections of delegates simultaneously with the May 2007 polls.

Rodolfo Alvarez, convenor of the Negrenses United Against Con-ass, also warned about public reaction against amending the Charter.

"Politicians should not entertain Cha-cha. Disregarding the sentiments of the majority will have serious repercussions," Alvarez said. He urged politicians to listen to the sentiments of the people they were supposed to serve.

In a text message, opposition Rep. Roilo Golez said Ms Arroyo's latest pitch for Cha-cha should not cause alarm among her critics.

Self-destruction

"We in the opposition should not interrupt administration [officials] while they are in the process of self-destruction. We should just watch in the sidelines as their *atras-abante* (backward-forward) game unravels," he said.

Another House member called for a dialogue between government officials and Catholic Church leaders so they could work on the mechanisms for "character change" and rally the people toward genuine moral transformation—a reference to the bishops' call during the Church-led "watch and pray" rally on Sunday at the Rizal Park.

Leyte Rep. Eduardo Veloso proposed the dialogue, saying the government-Church partnership in campaigning for moral transformation would be necessary and significant in eliciting public support.

"It would be an opportunity to prove that our leaders from government and the Church are united and sincere in pursuing moral regeneration," he said.

Veloso said a dialogue on the issue would help everyone come up with a "common framework" for character change.

"It is not enough that our bishops prescribe character change. They should also join us in fulfilling this vision," he said. *With reports from Christine O. Avendaño in Manila and Carla P. Gomez, Inquirer Visayas*

Strict enforcement of gun ban vowed

From page A1

against the violator but also for the disqualification of the candidate which the violator is affiliated with, he said.

Abalos said that the murder of Abra Rep. Luis Bersamin on Saturday and the earlier death threats against Representatives Prospero Nograles and Robert "Dodot" Jaworski Jr. did not necessarily mean that the May elections would be violent.

"The police have yet to determine if these cases are politically motivated so we should not just say that the next elections would be violent," he said.

Also, the attacks on and threats to lawmakers cannot justify proposals that politicians and their supporters should begin arming themselves, said Abalos.

"Such predictions [of election-related violence], for me, will only provoke and alarm political leaders and their supporters," he said.

Under election laws, the police would make the proper recommendations to Comelec whether a locality should be placed on a watch list or branded as a "hot spot" during the election period.

Security for lawmakers

The Constitution gives the Comelec wide powers to deputize the police to keep peace and order in areas where there are potential outbreaks of violence.

Close to 70 lawmakers had requested additional police security, citing threats to their lives even before the Bersamin slaying, said Senior Supt. Romeo Hilomen, chief of the Philippine National Police Security and Protection Office (PSPO).

Hilomen said around 60 congressmen and seven senators were provided protection by his office.

The lawmakers included Speaker Jose de Venecia and Senate President Manuel Villar, who Hilomen said the PNP was obligated to protect under the law, Senators Miriam Defensor-Santiago, Panfilo Lacson, Luisa "Loi" Ejercito and Jamby Madrigal.

Bersamin himself had requested additional police security around four months ago.

"The threats to (their) lives were validated by our intelligence group," Hilomen told reporters.

He explained that the threats on the legislators emanated from their personal, business and political affairs.

'High-risk' politician

Hilomen said the number of additional police security assigned to the lawmakers would depend on the level of the threat they were facing.

If the threat to their lives is high, additional police security could range from two to four, he said.

Hilomen acknowledged that Bersamin had three PSPO policemen as bodyguards because he was considered a "high-risk politician."

But at the wedding of his niece at Mt. Carmel Church in Quezon City on Saturday where he was killed, Bersamin apparently did not bring his PSPO staff, said Hilomen.

He said that despite the murder of Bersamin, no lawmaker had asked for additional police security.

The PSPO has more than 2,000 policemen under the command of Hilomen. He said the policemen had been given assignments ahead of the 2007 elections.

If he thinks the number is not enough, Hilomen said he could ask for more men.

For local politicians, PNP regional offices are tasked with acting as their security.

Task force

PNP Director General Oscar Calderon also announced yesterday the creation of Task Force HOPE (Honest, Orderly, Peaceful Elections) in an attempt to minimize if not eliminate violence in next year's elections.

Calderon said the task force would be headed by Deputy Director General Antonio Billones, deputy chief for operations. One of its primary concerns would be to enforce the firearms ban beginning next month.

"I have directed Regional Directors to start applying for search warrants to raid houses of persons reportedly possessing loose firearms," Calderon said.

He added that policemen manning checkpoints would be strict and search motorcycle riders riding in tandem, a common modus operandi used in murders and political killings.

Ang Kapatiran

Also yesterday, Nandy Pacheco, gun control advocate and secretary general of Ang Kapatiran political party, called for the immediate enactment of a total gun ban in public places, saying this would be "the best possible Christmas gift of the President and members of both houses of Congress to the Filipino people."

Pacheco said the gun ban law should include a stiff penalty for its violation—reclusion temporal or from 12 to 20 years imprisonment with no pardon or parole. He said there should also be a ban on tinted windows on motor vehicles whether public or private for the common good.

He said only police, military personnel and licensed private security guards in uniform and on duty should be allowed to carry guns in public places.

"There should be no more exemptions, otherwise, the gun ban becomes a farce," said Pacheco, noting that the gun ban takes effect on Jan. 14 at the start of the May election period.

PNP chief deploys elite force to Abra

From page A1

other provinces. "The evaluation of the task force commander is ongoing," he said.

Policemen identified with political groups would be relieved. "We will put in new faces," Calderon said.

Calderon admitted that the PNP had not identified any "private armies" in the province "but we believe there are some armed men going around in Abra and that is what we will address."

"Now that it's clear that the elections are coming, we expect that there will be private armed groups forming in the province of Abra," said Chief Supt. Raul Gonzales, Cordillera police commander.

Special Action Force

Calderon said he had deployed a platoon, numbering 30 to 50 men, from the elite Special Action Force to the province to enforce law and order.

Before the 2004 elections, the National Police Commission had ordered the suspension of the control of local police by local officials due to allegations policemen were being used for violence by politicians. This order has never been lifted since then.

Bersamin, 62, and his bodyguard, SPO1 Adelfo Ortega, were ambushed and killed outside Mt. Carmel Church in Quezon City after the congressman stood as sponsor at the wedding of his niece.

The other day, a lone gunman opened fire at the house of Mayor Albert Guzman of Dolores town in Bangued but no one was hurt, police said. Hours later, parts of the house were doused with gasoline.

Local police, however, said the incidents were unrelated.

10-15 people detained

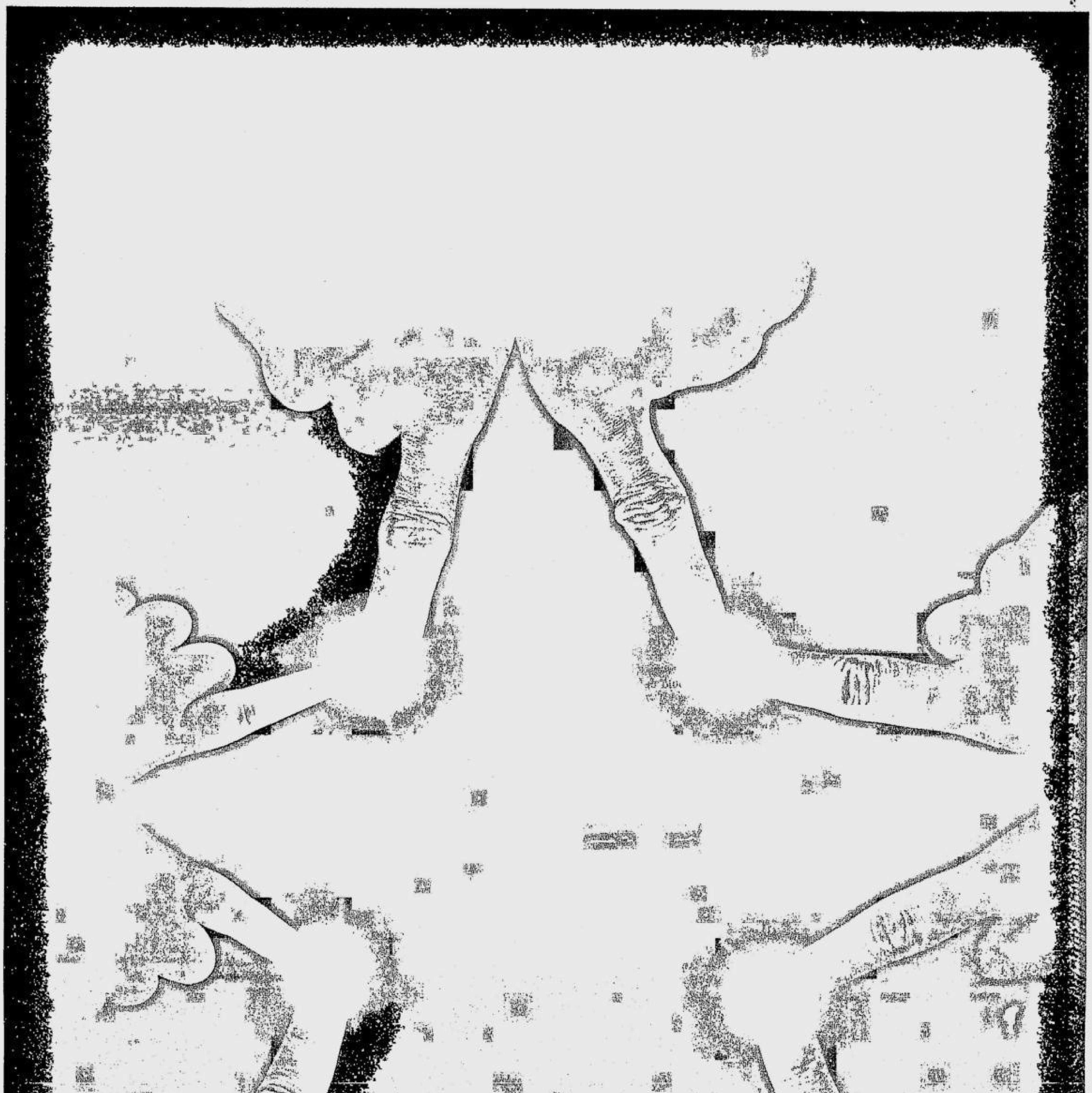
Director Jesus Versoza of the PNP Criminal Investigation and Detection Group yesterday said 10 to 15 people were under its custody in connection with the Bersamin murder.

He said the group included witnesses and former soldiers.

Versoza declined to give details but said there had been "good developments" in the investigation which covered other possible angles, including politics and the involvement of the communist New People's Army.

Speaker Jose de Venecia said on Tuesday that a 40-year-old former soldier had been arrested in connection with the murder and that he had information that the killer was a gun-for-hire given a down payment of P200,000.

He also said the House was putting up a P1.2-million reward for information leading to the solution of the case.


Believe in the power of Christmas

Christmas is a time for hopes and dreams to shine through. From November 22 to December 16, only about 8,000 MW of electricity was available to Luzon, 25% lower than what is usually available to consumers, because of the pipeline maintenance of the Malampaya gas project and the outage of certain power plants. Under the leadership of the First Gen Power Plants, the 1,000 MW Santa Rita, the 500 MW San Lorenzo, the 225 MW Bauang and the 112 MW Pantabangan/Masiway Hydro worked even harder to provide about a fourth of what you needed to make this season bright. Powering the progress of the Filipino is our way of wishing everyone a wonderful Christmas.

First Gen

US not winning war in Iraq, Bush admits

From page A1

amazing—constitutional democracy in the heart of the Middle East, which is a remarkable development in itself," Bush said.

However, Bush also acknowledged the threat of sectarian violence, saying that part of the policy review for Iraq that his administration has undertaken will deal with how to help the Iraqis provide for their own security.

"And I'll come forward with a plan that will enable us to achieve that objective," he said.

Two weeks before the November elections, which shifted control of Congress from the Republicans to the Democrats, Bush asserted that "absolutely we're winning" in Iraq.

Troop buildup

In other remarks during the Oval Office interview on Tuesday, Bush said he planned to increase the overall size of the US military, which has been stretched by wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. He said he had asked his new defense chief, Robert Gates, to report back to him with a plan to increase ground forces.

Bush did not say how many troops might be added, but he said he agreed with officials in the Pentagon and on Capitol Hill that the US military was stretched too thin to deal with demands of fighting terrorism.

"I'm inclined to believe that we do need to increase our troops—the Army, the Marines," Bush told the Post. "And I talked about this to Secretary Gates and he is going to spend some time talking to the folks in the building, come back with a recommendation to me about how to proceed forward on this idea."

The White House said Bush's decision about expanding the size of the military was separate from his search for a new approach to the war in Iraq.

"This is necessary for the long term obligations in the war on terror," presidential spokesperson Tony Snow said.

Stark departure

Bush's comments seemed a stark departure from the views of former Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld, who ran the Pentagon for the last six years until he was replaced on Monday by Gates.

Rumsfeld had long resisted calls to increase the size of the military, arguing that technological advances and organizational changes could give the Army and Marine Corps the extra capability it needed.

Rumsfeld's critics argue that relatively small-scale but grueling wars possible in the 21st century, like those in Iraq and Afghanistan, would find the United States facing well-hidden terrorist groups and persistent local insurgencies.

Such conflicts would inevitably demand strong, sizable US ground forces to keep such operations going, they say.

Among the chorus of voices saying it is time to bolster the military's size, Army Chief of Staff Gen. Peter J. Schoomaker said last week that he wanted to increase the number of US troops beyond the military's authorized strength of 512,000, although he used no figures. He warned that the Army "will break" without more troops and a heavier use of reserves.

Former Secretary of State Colin Powell has also expressed support for increasing the size of the Army and Marines, saying Sunday that they are "not large enough for the kinds of missions they're being asked to perform."

Bipartisan support

Congress would have to approve the money for an increase in the size of the military, and the idea has won support in recent months from many lawmakers of both parties.

Lawmakers would also find it attractive to boost the active duty force because that could reduce the reliance on local reserve units, which have been relied on heavily for Iraq and Afghanistan.

Snow acknowledged that Bush was considering sending more troops to Iraq, an option that worries top generals because of its questionable payoff and potential backlash.

Top generals have expressed concern that even temporarily shipping thousands of more troops would be largely ineffective in the absence of bold new political and economic steps, and that it would leave the Army and Marine Corps even thinner once the surge ended.

New decision yet

They also worry that such a move feeds perception that the strife and chaos in Iraq is mainly a military problem. In the generals' view, the problem is largely political, fed by economic distress.

Bush said he had not yet made a decision about a new strategy for Iraq, which he is expected to announce next month. He said he was waiting for Gates to return from his expected trip to Iraq to get a firsthand look at the situation.

"I need to talk to him when he gets back," the president said. "I've got more consultations to do with the national security team, which will be consulting with other folks. And I'm going to take my time to make sure that the policy, when it comes out, the American people will see that we … have got a new way forward."

Bush said his decision to increase the size of the US military was in response not just to the war in Iraq but to the broader struggle against Islamic extremists around the globe.

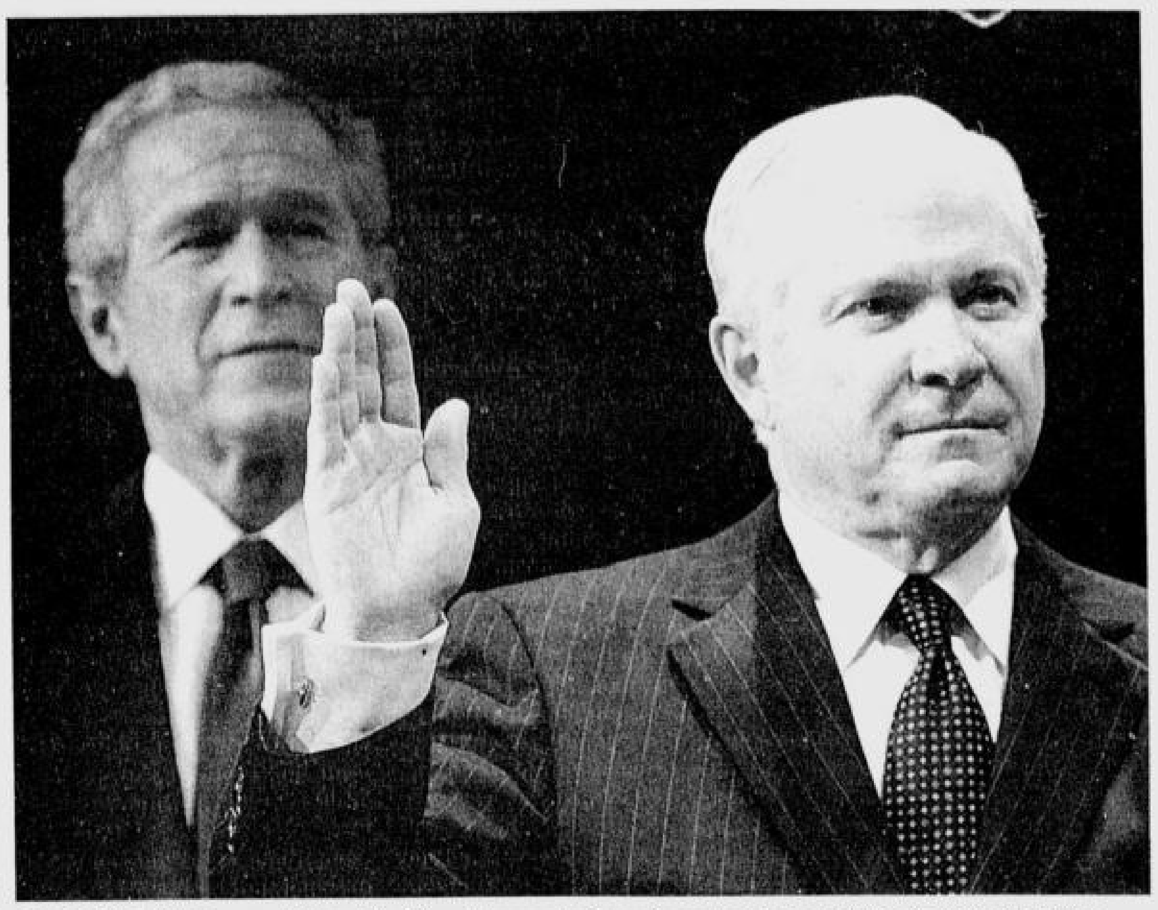
"It is an accurate reflection that this ideological war we're in is going to last for a while and that we're going to need a military that's capable of being able to sustain our efforts and to help us achieve peace," he said.

Criticism

Democratic Sen. Edward M. Kennedy criticized any decision to send more troops to Iraq.

"Instead of changing course for the better, the president's plan for more troops will make matters worse in Iraq—as many generals agree," Kennedy said in a statement.

"We need a political solution that brings these warring factions together and makes Iraq take responsibility for their own future." *AP*



US PRESIDENT George W. Bush (left) watches as Defense Secretary Robert Gates is sworn in by Vice President Dick Cheney during a ceremony at the Pentagon. AP

'Bush's Last Day' gifts a hit this …

From page A1

Day" caps, mugs, bumper stickers, buttons and other collectibles, are seeing strong sales as politically minded US gift givers stock up for this holiday season.

One of the most popular items is a pocket-sized clock that counts down the minutes—and yes, seconds—left in President George W. Bush's final term in office.

"We're close to selling a million pieces of assorted stuff. We'll hit that this Christmas season," said Elliott Nachwalter, 56, of Arlington, Vermont, who started the business about 18 months ago out of the back of his fly fishing store.

Nachwalter said Bush's Last Day was founded after outrage at the unpopular president's environmental policies spurred him to design a lapel button and then a bumper sticker that he shared with a few friends.

The message is aimed at expressing frustration with, and opposition to, Bush's policies on the environment, the war in Iraq and an assortment of domestic issues, he said.

Nachwalter's business has grown from an online-only storefront to distribution through more than 300 retailers from California to the nation's capital in Washington.

Business has picked up substantially since the midterm elections, which showed Bush to be out of favor with a majority of Americans.

Diana Graham, of Overland Park, Kansas, who voted for George Bush in both 2000 and 2004, is one such customer, buying a Bush's Last Day hat this week as a gift for her mother.

"She despises Bush so much," Graham said. "His last day—she is so looking forward to it." *Reuters*

RP, US sign 'agreement' on custody of Smith

From page A1

turned to the custody of the US Embassy while appealing his conviction.

She said the VFA provides for US custody of accused American servicemen or, "at the very least, in a place that has been reached by mutual agreement of the two parties."

"These two parties have already reached the agreement on the US Embassy premises as the venue of the detention of the accused. So logically, the accused should remain in detention in the US Embassy premises pursuant to the mutual agreement between the two governments," the senator said.

Fighting

Smith, sentenced to up to 40 years in a jail for raping a Filipino woman last year, has been fighting for his return to US custody pending an appeal of his conviction.

Held at the Makati City Jail (MCJ) since his conviction on Dec. 4, Smith had just been denied his request for a temporary restraining order on his commitment there.

The Court of Appeals ruled that such relief was untimely because it had yet to weigh the merits of his petition against Makati Judge Benjamin Pozon's order placing him in the local jail.

Explaining why he was junking Smith's plea for a recall of his commitment to the city jail, Pozon had said the custody of the soldier by US military authorities was "terminated after the completion of the trial and rendition of [a] judgment of conviction."

Foreign Undersecretary Rafael Seguis yesterday said he had explained to his counterparts in the US Embassy that "they have to understand our system."

Asked if he had sensed any sign of impatience in his US counterparts, Seguis said "it's normal that they become impatient."

"But we cannot rush this," he said. "There's nothing we can do but wait."

However, he added, "Washington knows and sees that we (the Philippine government) are doing all we can and that we have not abandoned that commitment. We are looking at it positively, that the issue will be resolved soon."

Turnover

If prison officials can have anything for Christmas, it would be for Smith to be moved out of the MCJ.

As the Marine would likely spend the holidays under Philippine custody with his latest legal defeat in the Court of Appeals, the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology has decided to petition for his transfer to the Bureau of Corrections, or a prison chosen by an agreement between Philippine and US authorities.

Supt. Serafin Barretto, BJMP director for Metro Manila, said yesterday that the bureau, as MCJ administrator, would file a manifestation before the Makati Regional Trial Court within the week to ask that Smith be committed instead to BuCor facilities where ordinary crime convicts are sent.

"We will submit maybe tomorrow or within the week our manifestation for the court to order his transfer to the proper facility per an agreement by Philippine and US authorities or to BuCor. I have spoken with my legal officers and operation officers about it," Barretto told the INQUIRER yesterday.

"We are always on heightened alert because he always has visitors from the US Embassy, his lawyers. For us, he was sent to [the MCJ] for safekeeping only; he was not committed as an inmate. If we accept him as an inmate, we will be violating international law," Barretto said in a phone interview.

The official explained that Smith had been kept in separate quarters within the jail compound as, being a convict, he could not be placed in the same cell as other inmates still facing trial.

Smith is the only convict in the MCJ, a detention facility for crime suspects undergoing trial in Makati's courts.

Over the weekend, Smith was transferred from the records' section to a former storage room within the compound, a smaller and more humid room still separate from other inmates.

No time limit

"We do not have a time limit for his stay … But as much as possible, we hope he would leave the jail as soon as possible," Barretto said.

The official said the BJMP would cite the following grounds for Smith's transfer in the manifestation:

- The MCJ does not have a facility for him "because the jail is not meant for a convict."
- Smith cannot be placed in a cell with detainees still under trial as "that will violate international standards" in treating inmates.
- The MCJ is already undermanned, and Smith's presence further divides the time and attention of jail guards doing double duty by watching over a convict and more than 600 detainees inside.

In sending Smith to the MCJ, Pozon had said the "temporary" commitment was in accordance with the VFA, as it would last only until Philippine and US authorities "shall have come to a binding agreement" on which Philippine facility Smith should serve his sentence.

Smith's lawyer Jose Justiniano had said diplomatic channels may be tapped to counter the BJMP move to seek the soldier's transfer. *With reports from Volt Contreras and Tarra V. Quismundo*

Grade 2 dropout now 'The Master' in US

From page A1

also makes signs for companies, such as San Francisco's Rincon Center, Euro Disney, Esprit displays in New York City and Los Angeles, Levi Strauss & Co., United Airlines, McDonalds Corp., Gap, Old Navy, Banana Republic, UC Berkeley, Stanford University and Bank of America, among others.

How Macalino joined the company is a story he loves to tell.

Wanting to be hired although he finished only Grade 2, Macalino first made his face familiar to Allen Thomas, a third-generation owner.

"Thomas came to work every day at 7 a.m. In my best suit, I would come around and greet him, 'Good Morning, Sir,' for two weeks," he recalls.

By that time in 1973, Macalino, then 25, had been in San Francisco for three months. He came on the petition of his Filipino wife and did odd jobs in a hotel.

The morning exercise paid off. When the owner needed a laborer to smash glass windows, Macalino was hired. He also cleaned the restrooms and threw out the garbage.

Because his English was poor, he asked fellow Filipinos to translate written instructions from his employer.

Eager to learn

Macalino had big dreams and worked hard. He did not want to be stuck in menial jobs forever.

"I was eager to learn so I started observing how workers executed the designs. Because the owners were strict with the hours and the workers did not want to be bothered, I decided to just observe. During lunch, I brought my food with me and watched them work on their projects," he says.

Because of the language barrier, the workers could not teach Macalino. He rarely joined them during breaks and in the few times that he did, he feigned being able to understand their jokes.

"It was like that every day. They could not fire me because I worked hard," he says.

Macalino started at $2 an hour, a meager wage for someone raising his own family while supporting six siblings and his mother back in the Philippines. At the time, a dollar fetched P7.

Clear goals

"I was clear about my goal. I was going to do signs. *Darating ang araw, malalampasan ko ito. Tiis lang* (One day, my break will come. I just have to sacrifice). I worked seven days a week and 12 hours a day," he says.

Then a job offer in Alaska came in 1976. He told his boss he wanted to resign.

But Thomas did not want to let him go. The old man called in a union leader who raised no opposition to regularize Macalino. His wage was increased to $6 an hour.

Macalino says he returned the trust by working hard and mastering the more serious jobs at the company.

"*Kailangang matuto para magtagal sa trabaho* (You need to learn so you would stay long in your job). I learned by observing, by learning the traditional and state-of-the-art techniques applied in the company and by experimenting," he says.

Hard life

Macalino believes he could hurdle the challenges because life in the Philippines had toughened him.

His father, a native of Capas, Tarlac, and his mother, a native of Masantol, Pampanga, were landless.

The couple tried to eke out a living in Quezon City.

When his father got sick with emphysema (a throat and lung ailment) and his mother's income from washing other people's clothes was not enough to feed seven children, Macalino sold cigarettes in Quiapo.

"I finished only Grade 2 because I went to school three days a week. The rest of the school days, I sold cigarettes. I dropped out because I had to make more money," he says.

Although he grew up with thugs and mingled with leaders of Bahala Na and Sigue-Sigue Sputnik gangs, he avoided a life of crime thanks to the constant guidance of his parents.

"They taught me to fear God," he says.

Elvis was here

To bring home more money, he collected cardboard and paper which he sold to junk shops. He also sold *balut*. When he was given snacks, he didn't eat them, he gave them to his siblings.

In his early adult years, he worked as an actor for Premiere Productions.

In the movie "Walang Patawad," he played the younger brother of the late Fernando Poe Jr. He played an extra in a total of seven films.

He joined a carnival and did Elvis Presley impersonations. This was where he met his wife.

"*Sanay ako sa hirap* (I'm used to a hard life)," he says.

Macalino believes he has earned some degree of respect from those in the sign-making industry.

"When high-profile designers come around, they ask for me and consult me," he says.

Learning, sharing

Through the years, his enthusiasm to learn has not diminished, although he is nearing his retirement years. Excellence, he stresses, is a Thomas-Swan trademark.

"I go out and interact with other sign-makers. At first, they are arrogant toward me because I am a person of color. But once I tell them where I work and I start talking about techniques, they realize I am not pretending to be an expert. *Pero bago ako mawala sa mundo* (Before I die), I want to share my knowledge," he says.

He plans to retire after five years and return to the Philippines. He wants to teach sign-manufacturing techniques or put up a small restaurant. Cooking is his second-best skill, he says.

Macalino attributes his success to the following values: Love of family, hard work and dedication.

Military recommends 4-day truce with Reds

By Dona Pazzibugan

THE ARMED FORCES CHIEF OF STAFF YESterday recommended to President Macapagal-Arroyo a four-day suspension of military operations against communist rebels in observance of the Christmas season.

Gen. Hermogenes Esperon said his recommendation called for a halt to military operations against the communist New People's Army on Christmas Eve (Dec. 24), Christmas Day (Dec. 25), New Year's Eve (Dec. 31) and New Year's Day (Jan. 1).

"I have given my recommendation to the President," the AFP chief of staff told reporters, adding it was up to Ms Arroyo to decide on a truce.

"That is a yearly tradition as a gesture for the Yuletide season. It will be a suspension of offensive military operation as a Yuletide gesture, but not connected to any peace negotiation," Esperon told reporters at Camp Aguinaldo. Two weeks ago, he ruled out a festive truce with NPA guerrillas.

Last year, Ms Arroyo declared a two-day Christmas truce from Dec. 24 to Dec. 25, but kept soldiers on full alert for possible attacks by NPA rebels who usually celebrate the founding of the Communist Party of the Philippines on Dec. 26 with ambushes and raids on military outposts.

Esperon, however, said the military would continue its offensives against Abu Sayyaf bandits and Jemaah Islamiyah terrorists on the island of Jolo.

This means there will be no Christmas respite for 8,000 government troops who tracking down leaders and members of the Abu Sayyaf and Jemaah Islamiyah extremist groups on the island the last four months.

Since 1986, the military has observed a holiday ceasefire with communist and Moro rebels as the mainly Roman Catholic country celebrates one of the world's longest Yuletide seasons. The Christmas season started with dawn Masses on Dec. 16 and ends on Jan. 6.

Fighting between the NPA and government forces has killed more than 40,000 people since the late 1960s. Peace talks stalled in 2004 after the United States and the European Union put the communist rebels on its blacklist of terror groups.

The government has suspended peace talks with the communists following the blacklisting of the National Democratic Front and the New People's Army as terrorist groups.

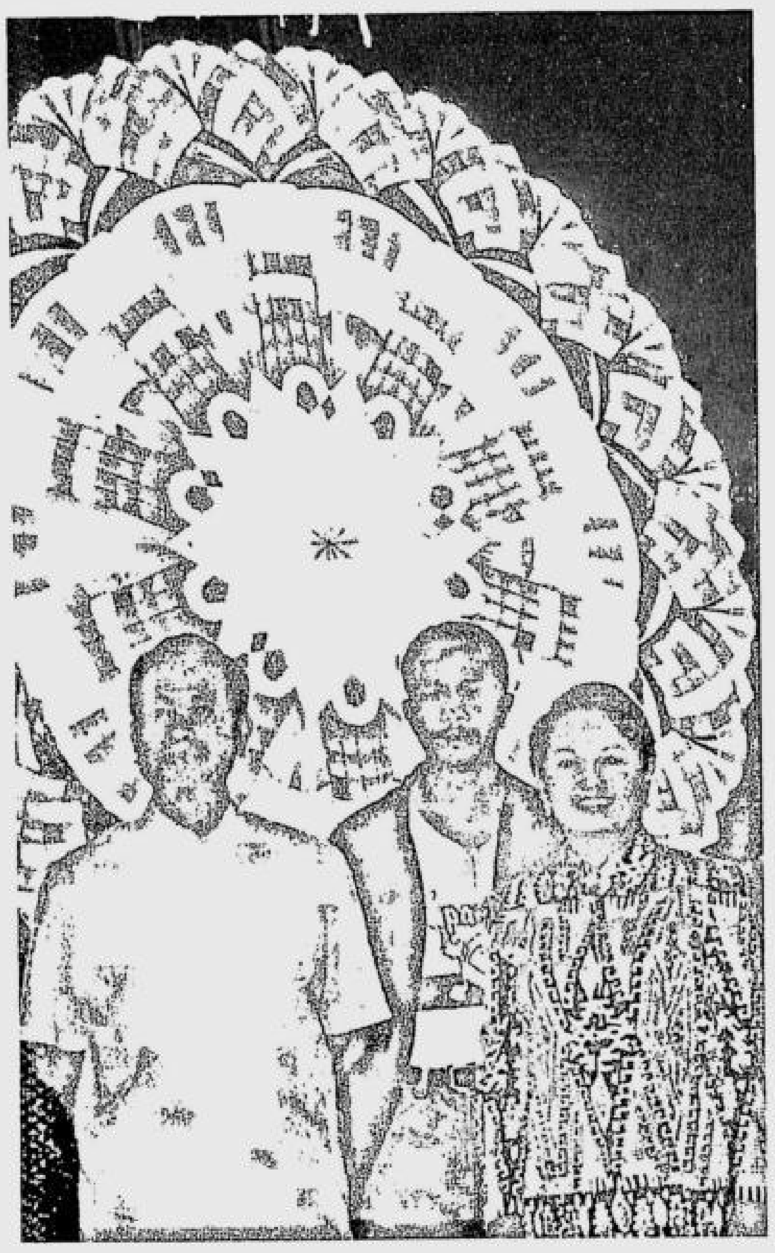
The government should push the resumption of peace talks with the National Democratic Front of the Philippines instead of implementing another campaign to crush communist insurgency through the Oplan Bantay Laya II, an official of a human rights group in Baguio City said.

Imelda Tabiando, deputy secretary general of Cordillera Human Rights Alliance, said the extension of the government's anti-insurgency operation would mean more extrajudicial killings.

"The Oplan Bantay Laya II will wipe out active guerrilla fronts, but we all know that the government is actually referring to legal [left-leaning] organizations because it does not make any distinction. The government wants to sow fear and wants us all eliminated," Tabiando said.

She said the military's first Oplan Bantay Laya, a battle plan to stop communist rebels and terror groups in the country, was successful "in killing people, in sowing fear."

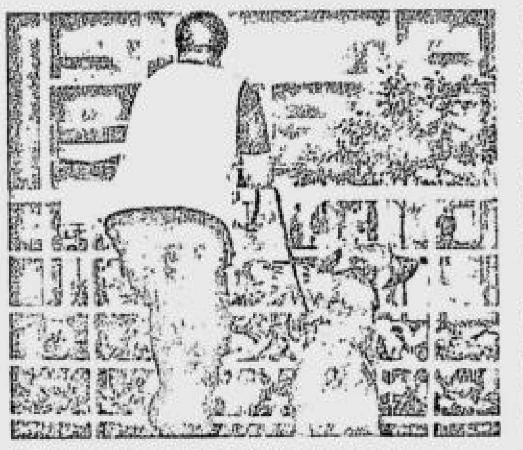
"[But] there is a growing opposition and outrage to these killings," she said. *With a report by Desiree Caluza, Inquirer Northern Luzon and Reuters*



WINNING LANTERN President Macapagal-Arroyo poses with City of San Fernando Mayor Oscar Rodriguez (left) in front of a giant lantern that won the Giant Lantern Festival held in the city. Behind them is Roland Quiambao, representatives of Barangay San Felipe, which made the winning lantern. MALACAÑANG PHOTO

Airport execs may ease ban on liquids, gels

By Nikko Dizon



A K-9 unit from the PNP watches as passengers arrive at the Naia-2 terminal. Security at airport remains tight, but a ban on liquids and gels may be eased. JESS YUSON

THE MANILA INTERnational Airport Authority (Miaa) is amenable to the relaxation—or even outright lifting—of the stringent liquids and gel ban but a ranking agency official said the Office of Transportation Security (OTS) would have to study it first.

"There's a proposal to ease up on the ban. We don't mind lifting it, but the OTS will have the final say on it," Robert Uy, executive assistant to the Miaa general manager, told the INQUIRER.

In a phone interview, Uy explained that being "national in scope," the OTS would be in a better position to assess the security situation and determine if there was still a need for the ban being in "close coordination with the intelligence groups."

Uy declined to comment on the current aviation threat level in the country.

While adjustments on the ban is "okay" with the airport authority for "passengers' convenience," Uy said security concerns would still be the main priority consideration in making a decision.

"We try to balance convenience and security, but the latter is always given more weight," he said.

A terror plot to blow up US-bound flights using liquid bombs uncovered by British authorities last August prompted international airports worldwide to impose the strict security measure.

As a result, international airports worldwide, including the Ninoy Aquino International Airport (Naia), prohibited air travelers from bringing liquids, gels and other items in liquid form in their hand carried bags.

Manila carried the security measure a step further by imposing the rule in domestic flights as well.

The US Transportation Security Administration (TSA) eased the rules on the liquid ban last September, as well as various airports in Europe, Asia and the Middle East.

Councilor escapes ambush, but aide killed

CABANATUAN CITY—A Councilor in Gapan City was wounded while one of his aides was killed when at least five men fired at the official's van in Barangay Mangino in that city on Wednesday.

Supt. Arnel Santiago, Gapan police chief, said four other companions of Councilor Elpidio Rueda, two of them policemen, were also wounded in the attack. Rueda was taken to a hospital in this city, 21 km from Gapan, and was declared out of danger.

Santiago said Rueda's civilian escort, Henry Mananggit, was killed in the attack. His security escorts, PO2 Alejandro delos Santos and PO1 Baltazar dela Cruz, the councilor's driver Nori Inocencio and security aide Eric Fernandez were grazed by bullets.

Police said Rueda and his companions came from the city market for an inspection and were on their way home to Barangay Sta. Cruz when they were attacked in front of the barangay hall of Mangino at about 6 a.m.

Santiago said the suspects, who were aboard a white Mitsubishi Lancer car, overtook Rueda's Mitsubishi Delica van and blocked it. The suspects then fired at the councilor's van but they were forced to flee when Rueda's group returned fire.

Santiago said investigators recovered at least 54 shells of M-16 Armalite rifle bullets from the crime scene. *Anselmo Roque, Inquirer Central Luzon*

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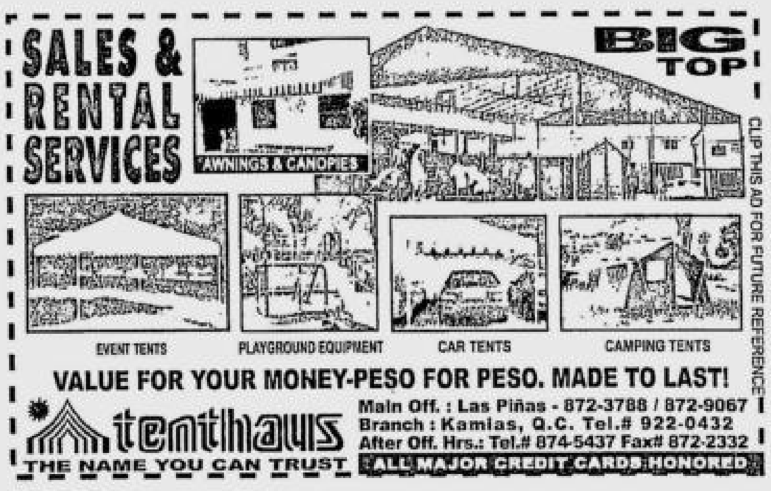

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TONETTE OREJAS/INQUIRER CENTRAL LUZON

THE LAND speculation and buying that the P21-billion Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway spurred has threatened to displace Aeta elder Amelio Caballero and his grandson, as well as 50 other families, in Floridablanca, Pampanga.

Aetas get back land, school in Pampanga

By Tonette Orejas
Inquirer Central Luzon

FLORIDABLANCA, PAMPANGA—SEVEN months pregnant with her eight child, Jocelyn Paule trekked back to Sitio Bucaran here on Tuesday.

By 3 p.m., she joined some 100 Aetas who have also returned, filling or milling around a school built in the middle of a basin-shaped terrain halved by a brook flowing from Mt. Pinatubo.

This was no ordinary assembly. Edwin David marked the importance of the gathering through a duroro, a prayer-chant to the tribe's god.

"We've said our thanks to Apo Namalyari. We told our god our land is our life, that we will not leave our place, that we will strive to learn in this school of ours," David told guests.

"This day is important. Today we return to take back our school and our land," said their leader, Edgar Apang.

The 47 Aeta families in Bucaran left the village in July when a land dispute had turned violent, seeing at least five Aetas beaten up by men loyal to a family claiming ownership over 10 hectares in the ancestral abode, Apang said.

The conflict erupted as massive land-buying occurred alongside the construction of the Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway east of the village.

It forced the Aetas to stop their Alternative Learning System Program, according to Romy Manuel, village chief of Bodega.

The school had been forlorn since then, said Romy Mañalac, chair of the Development Action for Grassroots Learning (Dangle) that responded to Apang's request for a literacy program last year.

End to ignorance

No one was ever enrolled in formal education before the program started, Mañalac said.

Manuel said the village council decided to spend portions of the development funds for the construction of the school because the Aetas showed great interest to get out of ignorance.

The school has a single room, measuring 12 meters by eight meters. Its roof is covered by grass that grows in the area while the floor is concrete. It has no walls and doors. A toilet was built at the back of the school.

"We first held writing, reading and counting lessons under the trees or in homes. We continued although the military at first suspected the mobile teachers to be rebels. When the school was built and we were ready to use it, this conflict set back our efforts," Mañalac said.

Teacher Arnold Montemayor pioneered the joint program of Dangle and the Department of Education here.

The nongovernment organizations Oxfam-Great Britain, Popular Education and People's Empowerment (Pepe) and Education Network (Enet) came to help in module development and publication, teachers' training and school supplies for 15 children and 20 adults.

"Traders stopped cheating on me when I learned to count my corn and yam, Paule told the INQUIRER.

Taking action

Apparently, Apang's tribe, the village council and their partners have not allowed the education program to go to naught and the land dispute to continue disrupting the community.

Mañalac said the campaign in the last five months saw them getting the support of the town council that thrashed the bid of the claimant to get the land.

The North Philippines Union Mission of Seventh Day Adventists Inc., whose land title covered a two-hectare property on which the school stood, secured the right of the tribe to use the site.

Lubao Mayor Dennis Pineda helped convince the claimant to leave the Aetas in peace.

Jing Pura of Oxfam attended the program to affirm the importance of education in the survival of the tribe.

"Education is a tool to defend your rights," she told the Aetas.

David Apang, Pampanga representative in the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples, said the tribe needs to file an ancestral domain claim to secure Bucaran in the long term.

THE DAILY GOSPEL

Thursday, December 21, 2006
3rd Week of Advent
Peter Canisius

1st Reading: Song 2:8-14 (or Zep 3:14-18)

Gospel: Luke 1:39-45

Mary then set out for a town in the Hills of Judah. She entered the house of Zechariah and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leapt in her womb. Elizabeth was filled with holy spirit, and giving a loud cry, said, "You are most blessed among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb! How is it that the mother of my Lord comes to me? The moment your greeting sounded in my ears, the baby within me suddenly leapt for joy. Blessed are you who believed that the Lord's word would come true!"

Commentary

Our God is coming, the lover of the human race, coming quickly, soon, speaking to us and telling us that it is the time of spring, of life, of birth, of blooming and giving forth fragrance. Do we stand together and welcome God coming to us: "Arise, my beloved, my beautiful one, and come!" Let us hear your voice! Elizabeth hears Mary's voice and greeting of peace and the Spirit rushes upon her and her child. Do our greetings call forth the Spirit upon those who hear our voices? Do we, with Mary, trust the Word of God spoken to us and act upon it, making it come true?

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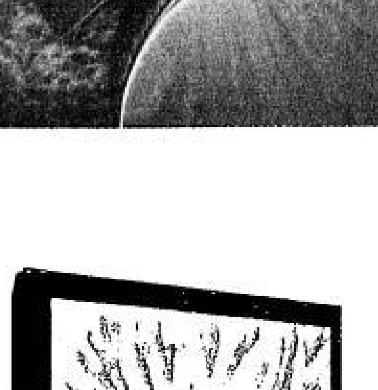

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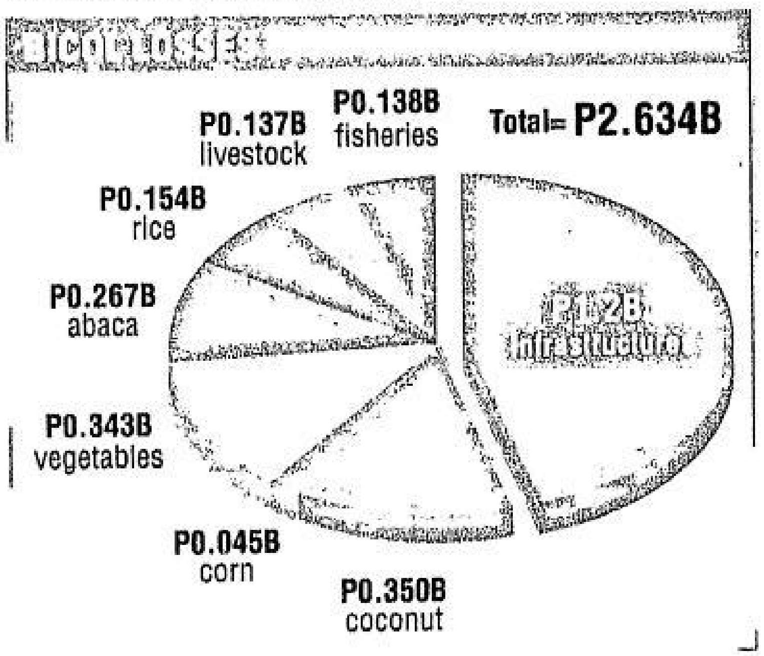
Bicol agri loses P2.6B due to typhoons



PILI, CAMARINES SUR—TYPHOONS "Reming" and "Seniang" destroyed P2.6 billion worth of crops and agricultural infrastructure in Bicol, according to a final damage report of the Department of Agriculture.

At least 101,308 farming families lost their means of livelihood to the two successive typhoons that ravaged Bicol, a week apart.

The two typhoons also decreased the sufficiency level for vegetables here from 83.2 percent before the typhoons to 26.5 percent after they ravaged Bicol.

The report recorded damage of about P1.2-billion worth of agricultural infrastructure that included aquaculture, irrigation and post-harvest facilities.

The coconut industry has the most losses with more than P350-million worth of production this year destroyed while the high-value crops that included vegetables followed with about P343-million worth of losses.

Except for corn production with losses at about P45 million, all other agricultural crops recorded hundreds of millions in estimated damages.

The two typhoons also destroyed 29,581 hectares of abaca plantation all over Bicol, destroying at least P267-million worth of crops.

For rice production, some 70,208 metric tons with an estimated value of P154 million, from the total number of hectares planted this season, have been destroyed—directly and immediately—affecting some 23,085 farm families.

Losses in livestock and fisheries was placed at P137 million and P138 million, respectively.

Also included in the final damage report of the DA were the more than P2 million worth of rice stocks at the National Food Authority destroyed. *Juan Escandor Jr., Inquirer Southern Luzon*

CA denies Michael Ray bid to drop slay case

By Armand N. Nocum

THE COURT OF APPEALS HAS denied former police officer Michael Ray Aquino's petition seeking to restrain the Manila regional trial court from proceeding with his trial in connection with the murder of public relations man Salvador "Bubby" Dacer and his driver Emmanuel Corbito in November 2000.

In a resolution penned by Associate Justice Elvi John Asuncion, the CA dismissed outright the petition for the issuance of a temporary restraining order filed by Aquino's lawyer, Bayani Loste, for various legal defects.

"Wherefore, in view of the foregoing legal defects, the instant petition is hereby denied due course and is dismissed outright," the CA said in a two-page resolution.

In his petition, Aquino named Judge Myra Garcia-Fernandez of the Manila RTC-branch 18, Senior State Prosecutor Phillip Kimpo, State Prosecutor Hazel Decena-Valdez, prosecution lawyer Benedict Medina and Assistant Provincial Prosecutor Cielito Luyun as respondents.

The court cited, among others, Loste's failure to show that he was duly authorized by his client to sign the petition for and on behalf of the petitioner.

"It is settled that the requirement in the rules that the certification of non-forum shopping should be executed and signed by the plaintiff or the principal means that counsel cannot sign said certification unless clothed with special authority to do so...," the CA said.

The appellate court said that this would ensure that the plaintiff knows better than anyone else whether a petition has previously been filed involving the same case or substantially the same issues.

"Hence a certification signed by counsel alone is defective and constitutes a valid cause for the dismissal of the petition," the CA said.

Aquino earlier asked the Manila court to suspend trial proceedings so that he could avail of a preliminary investigation.

The Manila court said a preliminary investigation can be conducted "ex parte (with one party)" if the respondent cannot be subpoenaed or does not appear after due notice.

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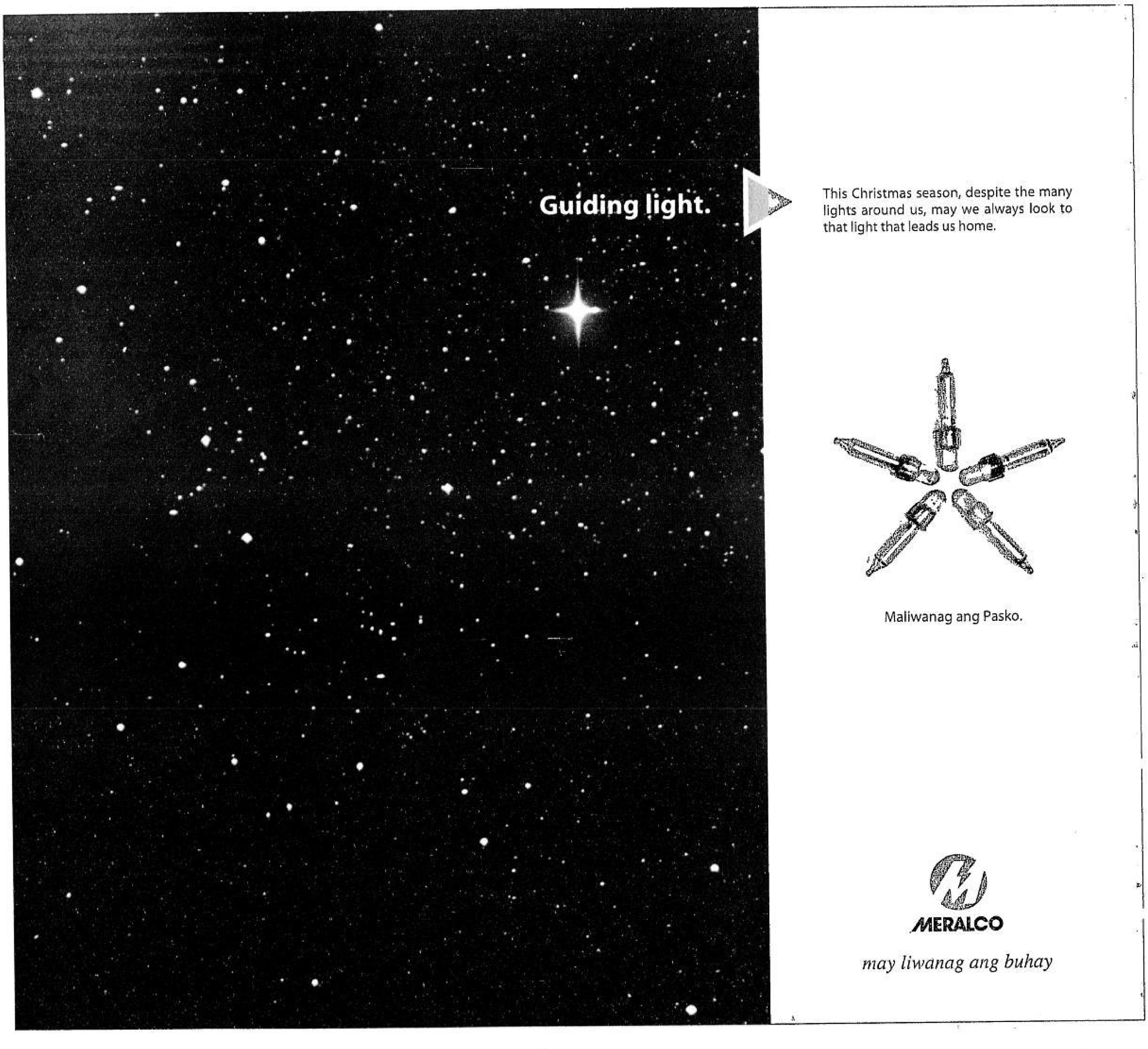

This Christmas season, despite the many lights around us, may we always look to that light that leads us home.

Maliwanag ang Pasko.

MERALCO
may liwanag ang buhay

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Killing season

EDITORIAL

IF IT IS ANY CONSOLATION TO THE RELATIVES of the late Abra Rep. Luis Bersamin, his assassination seems destined to become the exception in this country where getting away with murder has become the rule. After standing as sponsor at the wedding of his niece, Bersamin, together with one of his bodyguards, was shot to death Saturday in the churchyard of Mt. Carmel Church. Speaker Jose de Venecia said that as of Tuesday, the police had arrested a former soldier and recovered a pistol believed to have been used in Bersamin's murder. He went on to say that the hired killer received from the mastermind an initial P200,000 for the hit. All this information came from Director General Oscar Calderon of the Philippine National Police, De Venecia said.

If the Speaker and the PNP chief are correct, then the solution of the case is near at hand. For if the police have already uncovered such details as the amount paid in advance, then the arrest of everyone involved should be just a matter of time. When that happens, a new speed record of sorts in the solution of killings will be set. Then Bersamin might get the kind of justice that has so far eluded the likes of Nida Blanca and former lawmakers like Representatives Henry Lanot, Fortus Seachon and Marcial Punzalan, and former Sen. Benigno S. Aquino Jr.

This is what makes the situation so scary for ordinary people: that so many high-profile murders cannot be solved despite intense public pressure and the equally strong assurances of authorities that they would seek out the killers and bring them to justice. It is not an irrational fear, but one that is justified by experience. Just consider the scores of journalists killed during the past six years under the Arroyo administration, most of them still unsolved; and the hundreds of leftist activists gunned down by death squads, with the authorities hardly lifting a finger to find out who are behind them.

Now this culture of impunity that has engulfed the Filipino masses has begun to creep toward the circle of power. And if some good has resulted from it, it is forcing those in positions of power to demand action from the authorities.

After Bersamin's murder, many of his colleagues took the PNP to task for its failure to stop violence and crime. "Violent and criminal elements are running amuck," Rep. Rodolfo Albano said in a privilege speech. "Criminals go about their business with impunity. It is as if they know that they are beyond the reach of the law, and the law enforcers are inutile at bringing them to justice." Sen. Aquilino Pimentel Jr. warned that unless the police can speed up the solution of crimes and the guilty are punished swiftly, it will remain "open season for criminal activities." Sen. Richard Gordon urged the Senate "to will our law enforcement agencies to fight back."

Lawmakers also proposed several measures to help stop the violence and the killings. Albano called for more policemen to be trained to fight crime, saying that if the government can train thousands of policemen to control demonstrations, "certainly the police can train and deploy as much manpower in preventing crime and catching criminals." He also said that policemen assigned as security for lawmakers should now be pulled out and assigned to fight crime in the streets. "It is criminal to take away from the police manpower they direly need to perform their functions adequately," he said.

Those are all sensible suggestions, but nobody seemed to have heard Albano. Police officials say as many as 67 lawmakers have been assigned police bodyguards supposedly because of threats to their lives, and apparently no one is offering to let go of them. They all seem to have missed one small detail related to Bersamin's assassination: he had bodyguards, but he got killed anyway together with one of them. They all seem to ignore the interesting possibility that if those bodyguards were out there in the churchyard looking out for gun-toting criminals, they just might have caught the assassins before they could fire a single shot. They cannot understand what Nandy Pacheco has been preaching all these years: that only policemen ought to be armed and everybody else has no business carrying a gun.

And that is one big reason we have the killing season all year-round.

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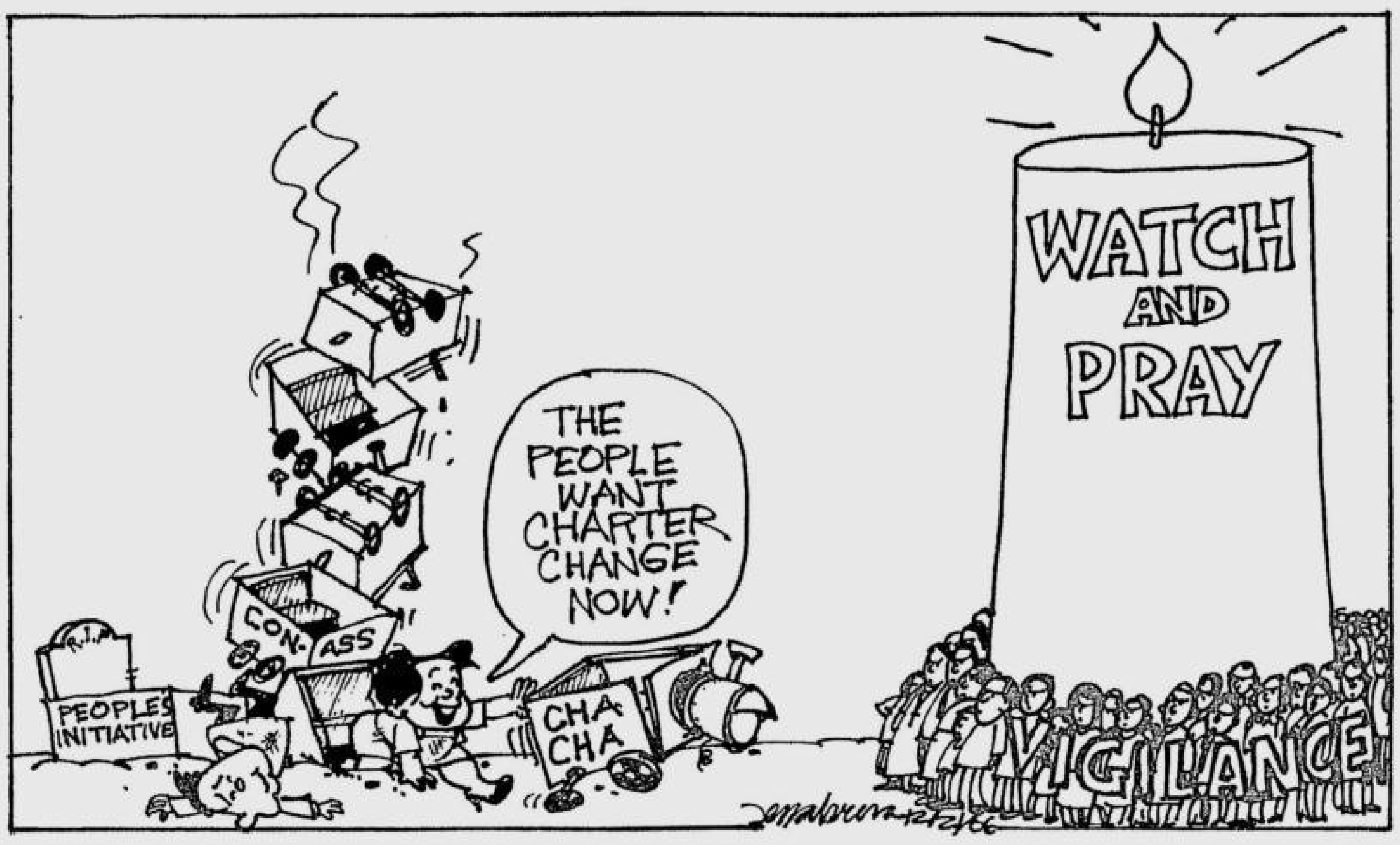

'Scrooge Is Here'

VIEWPOINT

Juan L. Mercado

AFTER THE CHRISTMAS DAWN MASS, THE beggar flagged down the wife as we walked by. "Your friend died at the city hospital," she lisped. "Friend" meant a pauper the wife had shared odds and ends: a spare blouse; some rice; medicine and a few pesos. Now, she was gone. "And we didn't even get her name," she murmured to me.

Like Lazarus at the rich man's gate, the woman blended into the woodwork: scrawny, diffident, burnt from begging in the sun. She was not unique. You bump into her in markets, jeepney stops, schools—wherever the better-off pass by.

Out of every 100 Filipinos, 38 scrounge below incomes of P100 a day, the United Nation Development Programme's "Human Development Report 2006" reveals. During Christmas, some emerge as shabbily clothed carolers. At street corners, the "bottle-cap brigade" of grimy kids whack flattened *tansans* tacked to sticks, to accompany off-key carols and cadge a peso or two.

They'll nod at statistics. In Negros Oriental, for example, the richest 10 percent consume 37 centavos. Contrast that with fact that the poorest 10 percent make do with just over two centavos—crumbs really, like those that Lazarus reached for as they spilled from the rich man's daily lauriat. The brain does not quite match the scream in their ill-fed bodies.

In this country, no one dies directly from starvation. Writing in Pathways Bulletin, a Grade 1 teacher said she looked to see why one child always crouched below her desk during breaks. "She didn't want us to see her eat breakfast—green papaya, soaked in salt and vinegar, wrapped in a plastic bag." This is starvation by daily installment.

And the resulting malnutrition opens the floodgates to debilitating diseases: from tuberculosis, blindness due to Vitamin A deficiency (55 percent in Western Mindanao) to anemia (47 percent percent in Eastern Visayas), the 5th and 6th nutrition surveys found—until Congress slashed the study budget.

Today, the tragic cycle of ill-fed, vulnerable mothers giving birth to shriveled children—who in turn will mother the next generation of dwarfed infants—is a reality, the Asian Development Bank has noted. Singaporeans, Thai or Chinese kids, are not smarter than our bottle-cap brigade whackers, notwithstanding the International Science and Math tests' dismal results for Filipino students. But they're better nourished and receive adequate natal care, precisely when their bodies and brains are developing.

"Many of the things we need can wait," Nobel Laureate Gabriel Mistral wrote. "The child cannot wait. Now is the time his bones are being formed, his blood made, his sinews developed. To him, we cannot say: tomorrow. His name is today."

"PEM, or protein energy malnutrition, ushers a bigger proportion of Filipino pre-school children to premature graves than in poorer Bangladesh, Kenya or Tanzania," the World Bank and Asian Development Bank have observed.

Exorcising hunger will not yield to revising constitutions by extending terms of office for congressmen. It needs "character," for example, to ensure that the "20% Development Fund" remains a resource to meet basic human needs, rather than a mini-pork barrel for local governments.

The need is for carefully thought-out programs and political will to meet basic human needs. Our late friend probably had tuberculosis. Her dry cough told more than the HDR's abstract figures do: 463 out of every 100,000 Filipinos have TB—compared to 133 for Malaysians.

That scourge stems from a lethal combination of poverty, chronic hunger, poor sanitation and dirty water. And our friend didn't need statistics to explain truncated life spans—seen in infant coffins—in slums where she had stayed. The lives of the poor are often "nasty, brutish and short."

"Unclean water and lack of sanitation are directly implicated in the huge gulf in life's chances at birth," the HDR 2006 notes. Households use a tiny fraction (5 percent) of total water use. But in all regions, sanitation provision lags far behind limited access to water. "And there is no evidence that the gap is narrowing."

"The view that poor people have access to plentiful supplies of cheap water is illusory," HDR 2006 cautions. "Most are already paying far more than they can afford to meet their basic water needs in water markets that reinforce their poverty. Water pricing reflects a simple perverse principle: the poorer you are, the more you pay."

There is plenty of scope for cost recovery from high-income households—those who keep their lawns green and their swimming pools topped up. But this does not apply to those who scrimp below poverty line. Water bills from vendors or standpipe operators can exceed from 5 percent of household incomes in Jakarta to 22 percent in Uganda.

A study of 15 countries shows that access to clean water, which our dead friend lacked, reduces infant mortality by 23 percent. Installation of a flush toilet cuts death rates by 59 percent in Peru. And water-related diseases cost the "equivalent of an entire school year for all 7-year-old children in Ethiopia."

The problems that kept our friend from marking Christmas are preventable. But those of us, blessed with education, skills and position, must first "open up shut-up hearts freely." Only then, will we discover—as Jonathan Powers writes in "Scrooge Is Here"—they're "hard as flint, from which no steel ever struck generous fire, secret and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster."

* * *

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Believe it or not

THERE'S THE RUB

Conrado de Quiros

WE HAVE A SITUATION TODAY THAT IS TRULY one for the books. We have a situation today that knocks at the door of Ripley's "Believe It Or Not." That situation is: Come January next year, Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo will be the longest-serving president in this country since 1986.

GMA will have occupied Malacañang longer than Corazon Aquino, the Filipino leader who was loved apart from respected, at least by the elite and middle class and by the foreign community, until her rule wore on. But notwithstanding the criticism against her, which became strident toward the end of her term, particularly on the issues of corruption and human rights (vigilantes, anti-communist cults, paramilitary groups), she could have gotten a second term if she wanted it. Easiest thing in this country to bend the law to suit clamor, and there was a strong residual clamor for her. It is to her everlasting credit that she willingly stepped down, thereby ending, as she began, on a high moral note.

GMA will have occupied Malacañang longer than Fidel Ramos, the president who oversaw the salad days of post-Edsa Philippine economy. Much of it of course was by luck, though he or his propagandists made it out to be by his genius. It was the heyday of Triumphant Capitalism after the fall of the communist world, given graphic form by the very literal fall of the Berlin Wall, and the Philippines was caught up in the economic boom that rippled across the world in its wake. Until the 1997 financial crisis came to burst its bubble and reduce to tatters the flag of unbridled laissez-faire. Whatever hopes Ramos might have had of staying on—he contemplated amending the Constitution too to allow him to run again—were razed to rubble by the tectonic financial upheaval.

And GMA will have occupied Malacañang longer than Joseph Estrada, arguably the most popular postwar president this country ever had. Probably more than Ramon Magsaysay. Short of not counting the votes at all, Joe de Venecia could never have beaten Erap—so overwhelming was his lead. Indeed short of not having elections (at large) at all, Joe de V can never beat anyone, which has driven him to embark on Cha-cha as though the devil was flailing at his back. Which it is.

Erap's rule was short-lived through his own fault. I do not know what might have happened if he had only half lived up to his vow of being "*Erap para sa mahirap*." But he turned out to be more "*Erap parusa sa mahirap*," courtesy of a cabal of hoodlums dedicated to ripping off this country. I recall that that was a time when I could not imagine how much lower this country could sink. It seemed like the utter pits, the end of the line, rock bottom. I did not figure on his successor.

But that is not what makes our situation one for the books. That is not what makes our situation an entry in Ripley's "Believe it Or Not." What does is this: Come January next year, GMA will be the longest occupier of Malacañang—"longest-serving president" is correct only in "longest"—**and she was never voted into office.**

She came to power the first time around by the very route she, or her truly appropriate alter ego (if only because of sheer ugliness), Raul Gonzalez, now wants to stamp off the face of the earth: People Power. She clung to power after May 2004 by calling up Garci and demanding to win by a million votes over FPJ, which she did. Either way—though the first is legitimate while the second is not—she was never voted president of this country.

There's more for Ripley: Come January next year, GMA will have been the longest occupant of Malacañang since 1986 despite being neither loved nor respected. Indeed, despite being reviled and ridiculed. Forget the surveys that show that. Mind only that neither Cory nor Ramos nor Erap was ever heckled by a student while addressing a graduating class. No, not even Erap despite his English. Indeed, GMA was stressing the importance of English when it happened, which only shows that there's more to communication than a facility in that language.

Come January next year, GMA will have been the longest occupant of Malacañang since 1986 despite overseeing only the biggest exodus of Filipinos abroad. As of the last survey, fully a third of the population wants to leave this country—which probably indicates only the number of Filipinos with the means to do it. If you count those without means but would like to, you would probably be counting nearly the entire population. With good reason: The dawning of the 21st century, which was largely GMA's term, has also been the sinking of many Filipinos into the twilight of hunger. Literally. For the first time in decades, hunger is spreading throughout the land with only the OFW billions to slow it down.

Come January next year, GMA will be the longest occupant of Malacañang without Erap's charm or roguishness. Indeed, with an approval rating that is inversely proportional to Erap's popularity. No other Filipino leader has drawn such popular anger and distrust, consternation and disgust.

Indeed, come January next year, GMA will be the longest occupant of Malacañang despite: turning lying and cheating into acceptable behavior, or one worthy of emulation, which some nurses have tried to emulate, as witness their conduct in their last licensure exams; turning murder and mayhem into national policy, as witness the alarming number of political activists and journalists in the provinces who have been gunned down, but which seems to be alarming only the global community and not the national one; returning the country back to the arms of dictatorship, even the thugs in Congress now want to impose their will on the people, who the hell cares if they like it or not. Despite all this, or maybe because of all this.

Believe it or not.

Custody issue straining RP-US relations

POLITICAL TIDBITS

Belinda Olivares-Cunanan

STAR'S LEGAL COLUMNIST JOSE C. SISON pointed out the ambiguity of Provision 6, Article V of the Visiting Forces Agreement, which provides for US custody of an American serviceman accused of a crime here, pending the completion of judicial proceedings. The ambiguity is evident in the provision's "susceptibility to varying interpretations," he said.

Judge Benjamin Pozon has interpreted it to mean the trial recently finished in his court. The lawyer of Lance Cpl. Daniel Smith and the Philippine government maintain that the appeal to a higher court—in this case the Court of Appeals and presumably the Supreme Court—is part of these "judicial proceedings." The CA has refused to grant the TRO sought by Smith's lawyer, until the two sides are heard. In the meantime, warnings are growing louder about the strain in RP-US relations the case is causing and how the world, including countries keen on forging a similar agreement with RP, is watching it very keenly.

* * *

It's a tight fix for the government. Sison argues that instead of joining Smith's lawyer and assailing Pozon, the government "should concentrate more in asking for a review of the VFA to remove such grey areas."

But we all know that a review or renegotiation would take time—perhaps years. In the meantime, RP-US relations are under terrible strain. Happiest about this are the leftists.

The VFA was signed between the US and RP on Feb. 10, 1999 and ratified by our Senate in May of the same year, when Joseph Estrada was president. I suggested earlier that the senators enlighten us on the VFA that they had approved, but to date, only Senators Miriam Santiago, Richard Gordon and Juan Ponce Enrile have spoken out, and all of them say the US position is valid. Santiago and Enrile were members of the Senate then, but what about the other senators then who are still around, among them Franklin Drilon, Aquilino Pimentel Jr., Sergio Osmeña III, Juan Flavier, Rodolfo Biazon and Ramon Magsaysay Jr. What have they to say about its "ambiguities"? Let's hope they're not just waiting to see where the wind will blow.

* * *

Some tidbits: Pozon is said to have been recommended to the Makati RTC by "The Firm," at the time Avelino Cruz was the chief presidential legal adviser. A few months after it was passed, the VFA's constitutionality was challenged in the Supreme Court, which later ruled overwhelmingly that it was constitutional. The lone dissenter was Associate Justice Reynato Puno. If and when the custody issue reaches it, it would be interesting to see in which direction the highly politicized Court would tilt. To be watched, aside from Puno's vote, would be those of the Erap appointees, notably the women justices.

* * *

Some bishops have decried the "selfish motives" of the House members who pushed Con-ass without Senate participation. But everyone has a motive, including the senators. The latter have offered various excuses to avoid even the Con-con that the House is now pushing, although 14 senators signed a resolution supporting Con-con three years ago, when the House was pushing for a Con-ass. Now the senators have changed their tune and their latest proposal is to conduct a referendum simultaneous with the May 2007 elections, to find out if the people really want Chacha. What will it be next?

* * *

Analysts point out that some senators don't want a parliamentary/unicameral system because they have ambitions to run for president. There's nothing wrong with this, but they should be more honest about their motives instead of shifting all the time.

Apart from abolishing the Senate, a shift to a unicameral system would find some senators vying to represent the same districts with their spouses, children or siblings. These include Senate President Manuel Villar and Senators Edgardo Angara and Rodolfo Biazon. Gordon's brother, James, now mayor of Olongapo, plans to return to the House next May. Among the Ejercitos there can only be one MP.

* * *

All kinds of reasons are being offered for last Sunday's rally's small crowd. I think more people were interested to go malling, since it was just two Sundays before Christmas. Then perhaps people are not that angry against Cha-cha as the media have been claiming. Critics like to point to the surveys showing a sizable portion of the people against Cha-cha, but as Standard columnist Emil Jurado noted, the questions appear to be so slanted that there could be no other answer but a negative one. One thing is sure, though: many people want change in our present political system. But perhaps they don't know how to go about it.

* * *

I ran into President Fidel Ramos' former assistant, Ching Montinola, recently and she opined that there ought to be a massive information campaign about Charter change. I agree. Such a campaign could help counter so much disinformation on Cha-cha. A friend of mine, who's bright and normally level-headed about issues, was so riled up about Cha-cha and it was good she opened up to me. She was angry upon hearing that the House members intended to put up an interim parliament where they would sit without benefit of an election up to 2010. I said that was so ridiculous and it would never be supported even by the most rabid Cha-cha advocates.

* * *

What was proposed earlier, had Con-ass materialized, was a plebiscite in February 2007 and elections for a new parliament by November 2007—a postponement of six months in order to give the Comelec time to prepare for the polls. But that plan was dropped with the scrapping of Con-ass and the House has proposed synchronized elections for Con-con delegates and elective officials next May. Then the Con-con can convene toward the end of the second half of 2007, well after the elections, which is what the bishops want. The bishops should welcome a dialogue with House leaders.

Reclaiming public water

HUMAN FACE

Ma. Ceres P. Doyo

A WATER RATE HIKE IN METRO MANILA IS UPon us and Ek Sonn Chan is on my mind.

There is something that water managers, providers, consumers, conservationists, activists and worriers, etc. might need to read. It is "Reclaiming Public Water: Achievements, Struggles and Visions from Around the World." It is about wide-ranging approaches in reforming urban public water systems that are being practiced in developing countries. It's about vision and against-all-odds innovation. I don't have the book but I have the abstract and lengthy discussion paper on it.

It was published in 2005 by the Netherlands-based prestigious Transnational Institute and Corporate Europe Observatory, and it has been going the rounds of international water forums. I picked up the abstract and several papers on water privatization at the recent Asia Europe People's Forum in Helsinki. Water services privatization in debt-ridden developing countries was among the life-and-death topics discussed there. At first I thought, what's water doing in debates on globalization and neo-liberalism? As I listened in, I realized that water, or access to it, is no longer just a basic human right, it has also become a commodity, a merchandise, what with water services being privatized and taken over by giant multinationals out to make big profits.

The announcement on the water rate hike the other day was like a douse of cold water on the consumers' pre-Christmas warm-up. On New Year's Day, you'll be paying more. That is also the day when the cold and dry season begins to be felt. Later, it segues into hot and dry, and humid too, and people will need to take a bath more often, wash clothes more often, water their plants more often. It is indeed ironic, for we have just experienced disasters of the watery kind that wiped out villages.

So are we wet or are we dry?

We're getting a double whammy. For didn't they announce earlier that there will be a water shortage in the national capital region (NCR) in the coming months? The water level in the reservoirs will dip, while the rates will soar. Is this about the law of supply and demand?

When water services were privatized 10 years ago, consumers thought their water woes would end. I remember doing a front-page, three-part series on big-time water thieves disguised as water suppliers of parched Parañaque. Privatization, the residents had hoped then, would ease their woes, and it did, but not entirely for the majority of Metro Manilans.

At the 2003 World Water Forum in Kyoto, private think tanks pushed and promoted private sector involvement. International financing institutions and Northern governments backed them. Well, studies like the one conducted by the London-based Public Services International Research Unit, have shown that "there is no systematic intrinsic advantage to private sector operation in terms of efficiency." In fact, water multinationals, among them Suez, have had to withdraw from concessions in cities in Bolivia, Argentina and Tanzania. (Suez partnered with Benpres in the failed Maynilad.)

There is a new and growing awareness that public water operations deserve support as they are crucial in achieving the so-called Millennium Development Goals. And the good news, according to experts, is that good public water delivery is possible. There are new innovative models that are rooted in citizens' involvement. "Reclaiming Public Water" documents these and cites ways of overcoming bureaucracy and other causes of public service failure.

A successful model is the "public-public partnerships" or PUPs, where high-performing public utilities are matched up with those that are not performing so well for the purpose of sharing expertise.

At the March 2006 Water Forum in Mexico City, the PUPs gained more support. This was a significant shift from the earlier water forums (the Hague 2000 and Kyoto 2003), where public water was hardly mentioned.

The Jubilee South-Asia Pacific Movement for Debt and Development's study titled "Water Privatization in the Asia Pacific Region" presents privatization as "a deadly enterprise." It cites the partnership between global giant Suez and the Lopez-owned Benpres (Maynilad Water Services) and the partnership between transnational United Utilities and Ayala Corporation (Manila Water Company). The World Bank had hailed these partnerships as the first large-scale water supply privatization in Asia.

The study also presents cases in the Asia-Pacific region. Privatization projects, the study says, are either explicitly included as part of loan criteria and conditionalities for borrowing countries or are prescribed for meeting fiscal targets required by international financial institutions.

Has privatization resulted in better services and affordable and safe water for many? Have other and better models been considered? There are now many studies on successful schemes in developing countries that the Philippines could learn from. Metro Manila's failures need not be the lot of other areas that still need to have a good water system in place.

Ek Sonn Chan of Cambodia, 2006 Ramon Magsaysay Awardee for Government Service, has shown that things could be turned around if there is a will. Ek, an engineer and manager, was honored for his exemplary rehabilitation of a ruined public utility and for bringing safe drinking water to a million people in Phnom Penh. Ek lost his entire family to the killing fields of the communist Khmer Rouge but he moved on to help in his country's rehabilitation.

With world support Ek and his team embarked on a major overhaul of the water system and showed that it could be done. It was a heroic feat for a government bureaucrat.

Mabuting Pasko.

* * *

Send feedback to cerespd@info.com.ph

A 'Calabasa' Christmas

THE LONG VIEW

Manuel L. Quezon III

"HELLO, CALABASHA?"

"Ma'am! Thank you for your card!"

"You like? Flenty cash inshide. I hofe you are grateful to me."

"Very much, Ma'm! It's just like what you gave the mayors in your brother-in-law Icky's province. Christmas love! Perfect description!"

"Good. Wait, my hushband wantsh to greet you."

"Yes. Ma'am."

"¿Hola? Deutsche Bank, I would like to..."

"Uh, Sir, this is Kapitan Calabasa..."

"Curly cabbages *que*?"

"No, Sir, this is Kapitan..."

"Kahitano? How dare you call me! I will destroy you! I..."

"No. Sir, I'm barangay captain Calabasa of Barangay Bansot..."

Hola, hola, Merry Christmas, *cabron*! Ouch! *Espera, mi esposa*, I mean my wife said not to say that. Wait, ha? *Perdoname, mi amor, mi vida! Yo te amo*, ouch, don't hit me! *Ay ay ay...*"

"Uh, Sir? Hello?"

"Hello? Calabasha?"

"Ma'am? Is that you again?"

"My hushband ish an idiot. Forget everything he shaid exshept the Merry Chrishmash fart."

"Oh, of course, Ma'am!"

"Anyway. How wash the rally?"

"What rally?"

"Hee, hee. I like the way you think. Lishten, I have a new favorite Chrishmash carol. Jingle Bellsh, Lagdameo shmellsh, Quitorio laid an egg... Tee hee."

"Amazingly amusing, Ma'am!"

"I know. But sherioushly. We have a froblem. And I want it sholved."

"How may I be of service?"

"You musht helf with the faramount objective of our administrashion."

"The economy, Ma'am? We gave away 10,000 T-shirts with your picture yesterday..."

"No. I mean revishing our conshtitushion."

"But I thought you said last week that we had dropped it?"

"Tshk tshk. That wash lasht week. Shtufid."

"Oh."

"Yesh. Did you know my favorite shong?"

"No, uh..."

"The shun'll come out tomorrow, you gotta hang on 'til tomorrow, come what may... Tomorrow! Tomorrow! I love ya Tomorrow! You're alwash a day aaaawaaaay!"

"Ma'm what was that? I heard a crash..."

"Ah. Attorney Bihon'sh makeup shattered when I hit a high note."

"Oh."

"If I find out you shmiled at that, no fork barrel for you!"

"No, I didn't laugh, much less smile!"

"Let'sh shee. I know who'sh been naughty or nishe. I'm making a lisht, and Angdaya'sh checking it—not jusht onshe, but twishe!

"Hee..."

"Shut uf. Don't ruin my mood. Sho, thish is what you shall do. Atty. Bihon will meet you and your Kalokohang Baranggay and give you the shame inshtructions we have frovided other officialsh..."

"You mean Governor Guiguisain, Mayor Matacao..."

"Yesh. The ushual shushfectsh. They will be reviving their frofoshalsh for Chu-Chu through fofular inishiative."

"But I thought there was a ruling..."

"That wash lasht month. Thish is for nexsht month. And beshidesh, I fredict my shon and congreshman Icky will fut forward a frofosal to revive Con-Ash."

"But I thought, oh, wait, that's right, that was last week..."

"Good. Shee? You're learning. I'm froud of you."

"Thank you!"

"Sho, enjoy your holidaysh and while you're at it, I want you to learn our new official danshe, OK?"

"What's that?"

"Chu-chu ish out of shtyle sho you will all learn the Hokey-fokey."

"Hokey what?"

"Hokey-fokey! Ash in did you foke me with a shtick?"

"Oh! Hokey-pokey! The American dance?"

"Yesh. Fut your money in, get your shignaturesh out, file it in and wave shignaturesh all about, do the hokey-fokey and hofe it all turnsh out, that'sh what it'sh all about!"

"Whee!"

"You fut your fork barrel in, get your Con-Ash out, file a resholushion and wave it all about, do the hokey-fokey and hofe it all turnsh out, that'sh what it'sh all about!"

"So catchy!"

"Yesh. And if you dishagree Shecretary Shipship will aresht you for shedishion."

"I am loyal!"

"Good. Oh, can you guesh, on the firsht day of Chrishmash, what my cabinet gave to me? A Dinky nailed to a fear tree!"

"Wow."

"Yesh and that'sh not all! Twelve bishofs drowning! Eleven farty lisht a-burning! Ten rebelsh a-fleeing! Nine Lakash members a-francing, eight ex-generalsh wanting affointing, sheven inveshtors a-bribing, shix smugglersh a-gifting, five new Kamfis! Four former Liberalsh, three shtuffed ballot boxesh, two ex-NFC'sh, and..."

"A Dinky nailed to a pear tree!"

"Anyway, I musht go. Shince it'sh Crishmash, I musht dishtrubute freshentsh to the unfortunate."

"In the provinces?"

"Sthufid. Of courshe not. All the third-termersh in the Houshe! Merry Christshmash to all and a good fright!"

Dreading Christmas

YOUNG BLOOD

Jose Miguel Arguelles

We want to know what the young are thinking about. What are their thoughts on current issues? We welcome contributions from the twentysomething and below.—Ed.

I DREAD THE CHRISTMAS SEASON. AND IT IS NOT ONLY because at this time of the year, you are forced to be happy even if you feel that the whole world has turned against you; or because you're expected to spend obscene amounts of money to buy gifts; or because you get to hear newer (but not better) versions of traditional Christmas carols performed by artists who can't carry a note but who have the looks and the clout to get themselves recording contracts. It is not even because my ears are flooded with the hideous caterwauling of carolers who just breeze through their songs and expect to be given more than one peso. No, these things are peripheral concerns. What I fear most about the season is going home.

Home is Zamboanga City. And home is where my father is.

Don't get me wrong. I love my father, who, despite being a grouch, can actually be a softie in the most unexpected moments. He has been a good provider to us, sacrificing the comforts of home to work in the United States for 20 odd years, though now he is retired. What I dread is the pressure he never fails to exert on me whenever I am home. The pressure to leave my low-paying teaching job in Quezon City, my family, my friends, my country and my students to seek a better life in America. He often tells me that I have no future in this country and that indeed this country has no future at all.

Every Christmas, which is the time I usually go home, he urges me to go where the pastures are supposedly greener and where milk and honey supposedly flow from fountains. And whenever he goes through this routine, I end up doubting myself. Doubting whether I made the right decision years ago to become an educator, whether I made the right decision to stay and help educate students who will someday leave this country, whether the seven years I have devoted so far to my vocation has been worth it.

These doubts are compounded every time I run into my former schoolmates and classmates—both those who work outside the country and those who have stayed but earn hefty amounts of money. Every Christmas, I tend to avoid such reunions because I feel so insecure. I become insecure whenever I hear them tell about their plan to spend the next Christmas with the whole family in a foreign country or about the gifts they intend to give to their loved ones. The stories are enough to crush my spirit because when I look at my situation, I know I cannot afford to give my family the same things. I mean, a public school teacher doesn't make millions a year—not even a quarter of a million. I even suspect that some of my students' monthly allowance is bigger than my salary.

All these experiences await me in Zamboanga. And every time I'm there, I end up entertaining thoughts of leaving this country.

My friends I can avoid, of course. But not my father. And his statements always have a profound effect on me. When he utters a simple statement like, "You should leave," I find myself being torn by doubts. I ask myself questions like: Am I foolish for staying? Have I been shortchanging myself all these years? Am I not doing what my family expects of me? Is it true that I have no future in this country? That this country doesn't have a future?

Not too many people look kindly upon teaching. A lot of people see the job as best suited for women, or as a stepping stone to a better job, or as a profession fit only for those who have nothing better to do.

My father has always disapproved of my decision to become an educator. He hasn't said it to my face, but I can hear it in his voice and I can see it in his eyes. I can sense it every time he mocks me by saying, "Here comes my son, the great teacher."

I first felt his disappointment a few years ago when for the entire time I was home on vacation, he uttered not more than 10 sentences to me. That was after I defended my career and told him that teaching was, in fact, an honorable profession.

Ironic isn't it? We are charged with shaping those who will shape the future of this country and yet we are not regarded well. It rankles every time I hear me or a colleague being described as "*isang titser lang*."

Sometimes, I think of not going home because the same things will be said and I will only end up depressed in the season of joy. But then, there's my mother who has been supportive of all my decisions.

I am glad Christmas comes only once a year. It's good that I only have to come home in December, otherwise I might just pack my bags and fly to America and leave everything behind.

Yes, I dread Christmas. The only thing that makes the situation a little more bearable is looking forward to the New Year. After New Year, I return to my job and for the next 11 months, I don't have to think about leaving. There will be no one telling me in a gruff voice and with disapproving eyes that I have wasted my potential by staying in a job that barely pays my bills. For 11 months, all I have to think about is teaching, guiding and hoping that my students will become better persons because of me.

I know my father has always wanted to ask me why I chose to be a teacher, why I shifted from electrical engineering to education. I hope he will ask me that question when I come home this time. I have the answer: Call me an idealist, call me a romantic, but every time I enter a classroom, I see 30 young faces filled with possibilities. I see the faces of the future. And I realize that this country does have a good future. It's written on my students' faces. And seeing that is worth more than a good life spent somewhere else.

Jose Miguel Arguelles, 28, is a teacher at the Philippine Science High School in Quezon City.

NOTICE TO YOUNGBLOOD CONTRIBUTORS:

Send your contributions by e-mail to youngblood@inquirer.com.ph together with your address, age and the school, course and year you're enrolled in or, if employed, the position you're holding and the company you work with. Contributions to Youngblood should not have been previously published.

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A disservice to democracy

LET US ALL CLARIFY THE BROUHAHA about converting Congress into a constituent assembly.

If the House idea of a Con-ass had squeaked through, the congressmen who compose the present 13th Congress will sit in the Interim Parliament without having to run for election, as provided in the transitory article of their proposed new charter. After the interim parliament shall have run its course, they can run again for the same seat under the regular parliament—with all the advantages and perks of incumbents—and run and run again after that.

That's like lodging inside the Horn of Plenty forever and ever! What's the life expectancy of the congressmen who are now or will soon be ineligible for reelection under present rules? They're likely to expire first before any parliament does. Ask Speaker Jose de Venecia and House Committee chair Constantino Jaraula of the lone district of Cagayan de Oro.

For this devious and determined attempt to rig the system to favor themselves and their dynasties, the 13th Congress is an accursed body. It is unworthy of our democracy—a democracy they are desperately trying to bend to their will. They can bill themselves as the "majority congressmen" but they do not, cannot, represent the majority of the Filipino people.

Is it possible that most Filipinos do not see the malicious, self-serving motives of these *trapos*?

—MANUEL E. VALDEHUESA JR.,
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Exploiting ignorance for personal gain

SO MANY THINGS HAVE GONE wrong in recent times—by design. It is time we asked ourselves what it is that makes our leaders indulge in willful deception to get what they want.

The saying is that ignorance invites deceit, but this cannot happen when leaders are honest and they do their duty in preventing the unjust exploitation and manipulation of situations for personal gain.

Of course, that can happen when leaders are dishonest. Self-importance and greed first destroy the "inner" world, then the "outer" world, which is seen when public service deteriorates. And it is the people in general who suffer as a consequence, which is felt when they are deprived of their basic needs like education, food, shelter, clothing and other social welfare benefits. Which is a criminal offense given that these are the first things a government must provide its citizens. Indeed, we have the funds to provide those needs but not the kind of leadership the nation needs.

The solution then is clear: leaders who fail to solve the problems should give way to those who can do the job. But what if those leaders persist in clinging to power?

That is the problem. Our leaders use "sweet talk" and other means of deception to do that. They even fight like savages over turfs, budgets, jurisdiction and even "pork barrel." Didn't they fight for Charter change after "Reming" had buried parts of Bicol under mud? The questions the people must now answer are many.

For example, if voting according to popularity or charisma only put corrupt politicians in power, what do we do now? Do we change the entire system or just the politicians who messed up the system? More important, are we willing to save our country from tyranny? Are we brave enough now to shout out our dissent?

Or will we, as we have been doing for much too long, just keep quiet so as not to create disorder?

—ERNESTO K. MAGTOTO,
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Church influence waning in RP

THE LOW TURNOUT AT THE Dec. 17 "Thanksgiving" prayer rally at the Luneta, which was led by the Catholic Church is a clear indication of the waning influence of this once-venerable institution. No matter how the organizers rationalize the poor attendance, it is evident that the people are tired of all these useless display of "vigilance."

But a more glaring implication is that the Church has lost its strong influence on the Filipino people. For centuries, we accepted blindly its ministers' foolish "guidance" on issues (e.g., population control) and their wanton violation of the principle of the separation of Church and State. It took that rally to make them realize that they should stick to their role as God's agents and not play god.

We have already enough politicians in this country and they should refrain from politicking. From the looks of it, the Dec. 17 rally was such a waste. It was full of opportunists. Vigilance is all right and healthy for a democracy, but misguided vigilance is a nuisance.

—MARVIN MALABANAN,
butterbeer21@gmail.com

THE 'THANKSGIVING' prayer rally for the supposed death of Con-ass and Cha-cha PDI PHOTO

Why few people joined the prayer rally in Luneta

1. MANY WERE TURNED OFF with the softening of the bishops' position. This is beside the fact that nowadays few people go to Mass on Sundays.

2. The massive disinformation campaign by Malacañang's phone and text brigades.

3. The news that Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo would attend the prayer rally.

4. The threat of the military that politicians and celebrities would be arrested if they went on stage.

5. The fear that the military and policemen who were mobilized by Malacañang would not hesitate to kill and maim ralliers.

6. The banning of speeches touching on politics, as well as of streamers, placards and flags.

7. The warning issued by Malacañang that terrorists and communist rebels were out to set off explosives in the crowd.

8. The blockades put up by the military in all entry points to prevent would-be rally participants from reaching Luneta.

9. The chilling effect of the cold-blooded murder of Abra Rep. Luis Bersamin.

10. GMA's early pronouncement that she's backing off from pursuing Cha-cha and Con-ass.

—FRANKY A. NOYAN,
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Judge Pozon's decision on Nicole case commendable

JUDGE BENJAMIN POZON'S DEcision on Nicole's case was very commendable. I don't understand why there are still people, like Grace Santos, who are dying to defend convicted rapist Lance Cpl. Daniel Smith.

Filipino women are being raped not only in the Philippines but all over the world. They are being abused by foreigners because they know that no one is out there to protect the women.

Now that a man like Judge Pozon has decided to stand for the truth, Santos reacts by holding a vigil to demand that Smith be turned over to US custody.

—RICHARD BAUTISTA,
lion_heart13@hotmail.com

Our leaders' unbelievable pride in 'supermaids'

UNTIL NOW I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE that the so-called leaders of our country are taking pride in seeing their own kind exported as "supermaids."

These college graduates and highly educated Filipinas worked hard to get through school only to be traded as supermaids, even as they are dubbed as the country's new heroes.

That sure is adding grave insult to injury. *Nakaloko na, nang-uuto pa.* Our so-called leaders should be ashamed!

—NONONG RAMIREZ,
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One October in San Francisco

COMMENTARY

Gemma Rita R. Marin
Institute on Church and Social Issues

I SPENT THE WHOLE MONTH OF last October in the United States, specifically San Francisco, Los Angeles and, very briefly, Las Vegas. It was a long-planned trip and much-needed break. Even if it was a sojourn by my lonesome, it was the kind of vacation that I have always wanted. I saw new places. I visited good old friends. I shopped. I had the time for myself. I stayed in bed until about 8 in the morning (although my body clock would wake me up between 5 a.m. and 6 a.m.). And even if I had to do some reading or writing, I did it leisurely and without stress.

I got to explore most of San Francisco from downtown to the ferry building and Pier 39, rode the cable car to reach Fisherman's Wharf, traversed the zigzags of Lombard Street, cruised and took an awesome view of the Golden Gate Bridge and Bay Bridge, spent an afternoon in Marin County and reached the Twin Peaks to enjoy a night view of San Francisco. I was also able to commune with nature in Yosemite, and go round the 17-mile drive in Monterey, Carmel and Sta. Clara University twice over.

In LA, I was mostly confined in the northern part, Burbank specifically. I saw the 3D presentations of "Shrek" and "The Terminator" in Universal Studios, appreciated European art in the Getty Museum, gallivanted in the Grove and Sta. Monica Pier, and went around the Pike in Long Beach. The brief visit in Las Vegas took me and my best friend to the Strip to see various hotels and casinos like Caesar's Palace, the Venetian, Paris, Bellagio and Treasure Island. In the end, I spent more for shopping than gambling.

During the entire month, I was blessed with the kindness of friends who had to struggle during their first years in the United States, yet offered me now more than a home. Each has a story to tell of how they have endured a life of being physically distant from their loved ones and managed to do well.

Marie left a husband and two children for the United States to engage in development work. Three years ago, there was nothing definite about getting a job. She involved herself in various volunteer work from the east to the west coast, hoping to link up with the right development agency eventually. While she found a more regular job in the process, she continues with her socio-civic work and assists fellow Filipinos who are in the same situation she was three years ago.

With a J-visa, Dina grabbed the opportunity to teach special education in an elementary school in the Bay Area even if she had to leave her husband and five kids in Mindanao. Without any communication facility or form of entertainment in her apartment, coming home from work in her first two weeks in America was a harrowing experience. With the help of friends, she was able to slowly put up the necessary appliances, furniture and fixtures, computer and the Internet that would keep her connected to her family and friends in the Philippines. She now looks forward to being reunited soon with her two youngest children, aged 5 and 9, who were recently granted J-2 visas.

Back in 1998, Anna and her husband were worried about their sons getting associated with strangers in the mall or people with devious backgrounds. To prevent the sons from going astray, they decided to send the children to a military school in the United States where they hoped the boys would become more disciplined and safe.

Left behind in the Philippines, the couple suddenly found themselves facing long-standing issues in their relationship which became too complicated to mend. Anna chose to join her sons and find a life of her own in the United States. She eventually found a job that paid enough to sustain her and the children. With some help from the in-laws, she was able to finance the school requirements of the boys.

These are stories with happy endings of making it abroad. Not all stories, however, end up happily.

Because of the lack of opportunities, continuing political scandals and bickering, aggravated by natural disasters, more and more Filipinos find themselves seeking greener pastures abroad even if it means being away from loved ones. In 2005, the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration reported the highest deployment of overseas workers, having assisted almost a million OFWs in more than 180 countries of destinations. The POEA also said that an average of 2,700 Filipino workers left daily that year mainly for land- and sea-based jobs. Some were duped by recruitment agencies and ended up landing filthy jobs about which they were not told before they left the Philippines.

We hear of gruesome stories and experiences suffered by OFWs in various parts of the world—ranging from un-negotiated low pay to poor accommodations and physical, mental and emotional abuse by employers.

These are the usual reported stories. But there are too the countless unreported cases which reveal undesirable tales: White-collar workers who settle or end up with blue-collar jobs; professionals in their 40s or 50s starting anew, usually doing clerical tasks; health or ordinary workers caring for the elderly abroad rather than their own parents or relatives at home; whole families migrating and venturing into the unfamiliar; the bereaved who cannot come home to pay last respects to their dead.

During that vacation trip in October, a former colleague, who has been staying in California for almost 20 years now, asked, "Is it really that bad in the Philippines?" Not about to bombard her with statistics and figures in an informal gathering of friends, I answered her by citing the case of another friend who is being petitioned by her father since the 1980s.

In the past, she had never thought of leaving; she wanted only to devote all her talents for the country; today, she admits that there is no particular desire to stay. If she leaves, it is truly sad for the Philippines to lose another useful citizen. This likely Filipino migrant, though, may still be considered luckier than most others who have no option or recourse but to leave because of need.

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9 backpackers linked to rebs freed

By Desiree Caluza
Inquirer Northern Luzon

LA TRINIDAD, BENGUET—THE NINE BACKPACKers who were arrested in February for their supposed involvement in a communist raid on a military detachment in Mankayan town would spend Christmas with their families after a local court ordered their release on Wednesday.

Judge Benigno Galacgac, of the Benguet regional trial court, on Tuesday dismissed for lack of evidence the homicide and arson cases filed by the police against the group.

"This is a very early Christmas gift for us. I will never ever forget this experience. We are now free," said Rundren Berloize Lao, 24.

Lao was among the backpackers who called their group "Punks R Us." The group's members were from Metro Manila, the Ilocos, Southern Tagalog and Davao City.

Lao and his eight companions were arrested on Feb. 14 and released from the Benguet provincial jail before noon.

The group originally included a 17-year-old boy from Pasig City and a 16-year-old girl from Marikina City. The minors were released in May after their lawyers cited the Juvenile Justice Law that protects minors from criminal prosecution.

Benguet policemen and soldiers arrested them while they were on their way to Sagada, Mt. Province. They said they were going to the tourist town for an adventure trek.

But Chief Supt. Raul Gonzales, Cordillera police director, said the Benguet police had evidence to support claims that the backpackers had participated in the Feb. 10 raid conducted by the New People's Army in Mankayan.

A soldier and two government militiamen were killed in that raid.

"We, the Punks 11, have received the best Christmas gift. We leave the Benguet provincial jail after more than 10 months of incarceration [due to] charges that we are innocent of," the group said in a statement they read at the jail compound.

"We thank our parents, brothers and sisters, and other relatives who stood by us during the difficult times. This experience made us closer to each other. We have realized the value of family care and love," they said.

Their relatives, lawyers and human rights groups led by the Cordillera Human Rights Alliance (CHRA) and the Free Legal Assistance Group (Flag) prepared a party for the group at the jail compound. A pig was butchered and cooked for a feast.

"This case only proved that there is a need for better police work so mistakes will not happen anymore. Ten months of their lives were wasted," Pablito Sanidad, one of the group's lawyers, told the INQUIRER.

Beverly Longid, former CHRA vice chair, said the dismissal of the case only proved that the group was innocent of the charges.

She said the backpackers suffered mental and physical torture from the police during their detention.

In earlier interviews, Benguet police officials had denied that they abused or harmed the backpackers.

Apart from Lao, those released were Anderson Alonzo, 18; Jethro Villagracia, 21; Ron Pandino, 19; Darwin Alagar, 20; Aldus Christian Mañosa, 18; Jefferson de la Rosa, 20; Neil Russel Balajadia, 25; and Arvie Nuñez, 21.

Their arrest and detention earned media attention. An online petition for their release gathered more than 2,000 signatures from the Philippines and abroad.

Flordeliza Mañosa, mother of Aldus Christian Mañosa, said her son's experience has changed his outlook in life.

"He has learned a lot from this experience. He said he wanted to go back to school and I was glad to hear that," the elder Mañosa said.

Soldiers stop farmers from attending rights forum

BAGUIO CITY—A GROUP OF farmers from Balbalan, Kalinga, failed to attend a human rights forum in the capital town of Tabuk after soldiers held and questioned them at a checkpoint last week, according to a human rights group here.

Imelda Tabiando, deputy secretary general of Cordillera Human Rights Alliance (CHRA), said the farmers were questioned by soldiers from the Army's 21st Infantry Battalion about the nature of the activity held on Dec. 15.

CHRA officials, in a forum here this week, also said some residents of Balbalan reported that they were not allowed by the military to leave their communities.

Maj. Ferdinand Razalan, spokesperson of the military's Northern Luzon Command, said officials of the 21st IB had denied that they harassed farmers in Balbalan.

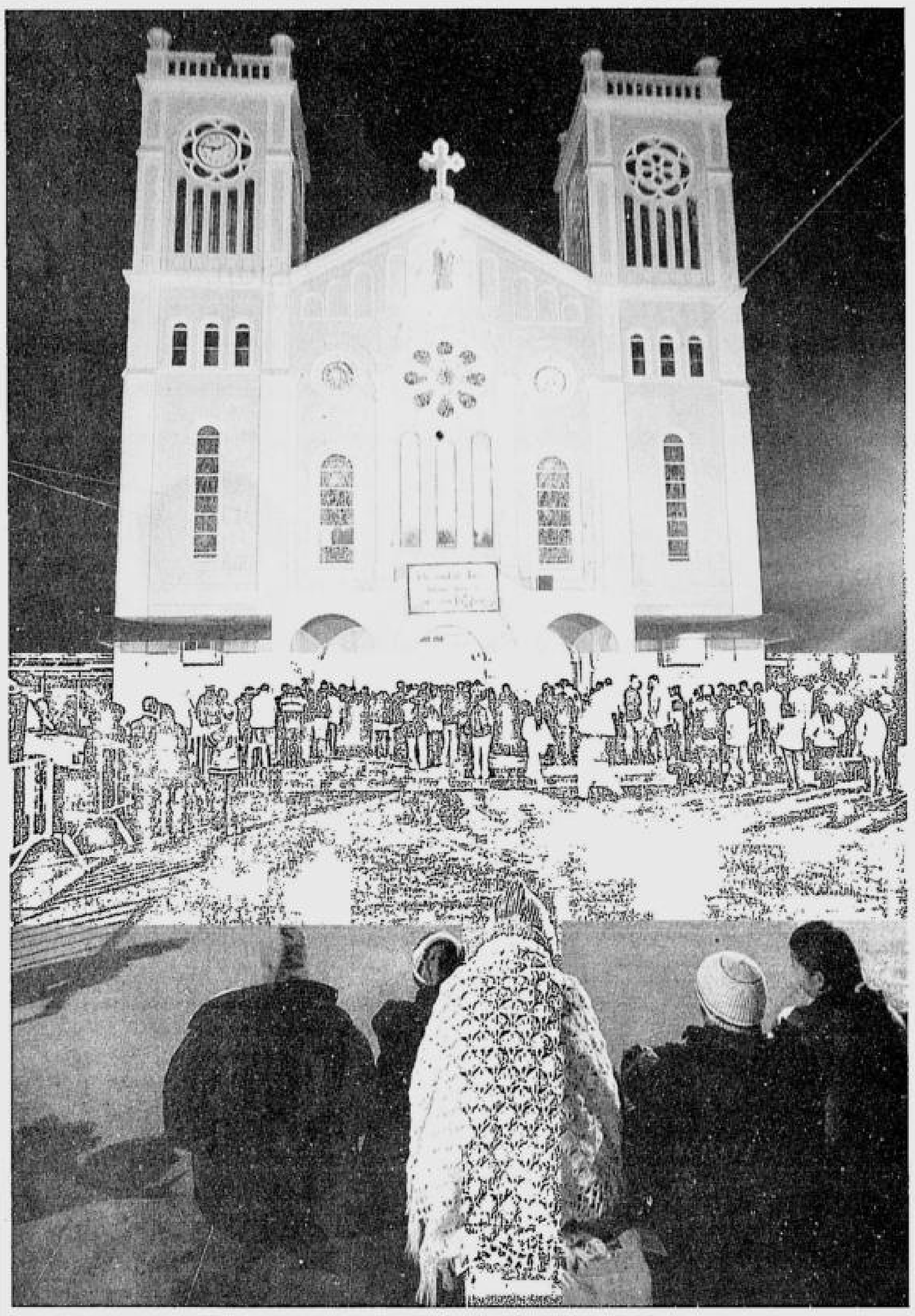
"The head of the 21st IB unit denied that such a thing happened. They even celebrated the International Human Rights Day [last week]," Razalan said in a telephone interview.

But he promised to investigate the complaint.

Tabiando said members of nongovernment organizations who wanted to look into the situation of villagers in Balbalan were being prevented from entering some villages.

"The military has a policy that those who would visit the town to always sign in a log book so they could monitor all people in the area," she said.

Jude Baggo, CHRA staff member, said Balbalan and other towns in Kalinga are considered by the military as strongholds of the New People's Army. *Desiree Caluza, Inquirer Northern Luzon*



MORNING CHILL
TOOTS SOBERANO/INQUIRER NORTHERN LUZON
Families, teenagers and children are all bundled up because of cold temperatures while attending midnight Mass at the Baguio Cathedral.

Phivolcs equipment in Bulusan disappear

SORSOGON CITY—THE PHILIPpine Institute of Volcanology and Seismology here lost some P1.1 million worth of vital assets when robbers took several units of monitoring equipment in one of its monitoring sites around the Bulusan Volcano last Sunday, a Phivolcs official said.

Crispulo Diolata, officer-in-charge of the Phivolcs monitoring station based here, said among those missing were one unit of K-2 digitizer worth P1 million, seismometer which costs P50,000, five solar gel batteries worth P50,000 and supervisory unit with grounding cable costing P30,000.

Diolata said the equipment, which were installed at Barangay Salvacion in Irosin town, were very vital, especially the K-2 digitizer as it served as the link of all the monitoring equipment in Barangay San Roque, Bulusan and Lover's Trail in Monbon, Irosin to the main monitoring station here.

Phivolcs director Renato Solidum Jr. appealed to Gov. Raul Lee and other local officials to help them secure the equipment.

Solidum said their data gathering was now greatly impaired, considering that Bulusan remained under Alert Level 1 and had shown signs of restiveness in recent months.

At 1:09 a.m. of Dec. 20, Bulusan Volcano spewed ash anew, said the personnel-on-duty at the volcano's observatory here.

"It was not possible to measure the height of the explosion as it was still dark and because of heavy rains in the area," said Orlando Guardacasa, Phivolcs science research specialist.

He said ashfalls were monitored in Barangays Monbon and Poblacion in Irosin.

Village chief Manrico Frejas of Barangay Patag, Irosin said "lahar flow from Rangas River in Juban town reached their area."

Guardacasa said the ashfall was measured at 2 mm in Monbon, and 0.5 mm in Poblacion.

Meanwhile, in its latest advisory issued Dec. 14, Phivolcs said Taal Volcano had been acting up, accompanied by 10 volcanic earthquakes, increasing water acidity and hydrothermal activity.

Allan Luza, Phivolcs volcanologist at the Taal Volcano Observatory in Talisay, Batangas, said the volcano remained at Alert Level 1.

The volcano's main crater should be "strictly off-limits to the public," and that the northern portion of main crater rim along the Daang Kastila Trail might also be hazardous, the Phivolcs advised.

Talisay Mayor Florencio Manimtim has been asked to intensify security measures for tourists entering the crater. *Bobby Labalan and Marlon Luistro, Inquirer Southern Luzon*

ROUNDUP

Cargo ship runs aground

TUGUEGARAO CITY—A cargo ship carrying some 4,000 metric tons of fertilizer was beached by strong winds and waves in Ballesteros, Cagayan, on Sunday. Police said no one was hurt when the ship was pushed inland. The ship was on its way to Sta. Ana town when it was battered by strong waves in Barangay Cabaritan. In Gonzaga town, two fishermen were reported missing when their boat capsized also on Sunday, police said.
Estanislao Caldez, Inquirer Northern Luzon

Inquirer man top Baguio citizen

BAGUIO CITY—INQUIRER correspondent Maurice Malanes was named one of the outstanding citizens of Baguio for advocating indigenous culture and rights. Malanes and eight other outstanding residents will receive their awards on Dec. 30. Malanes, who covers Benguet, was cited for his documentation of the Kankanaey and Bago tribes' ancestral domain management in Bakun, Benguet, and the traditional resource management system of the Tinggians in Abra. Other awardees are Erlyn Ruth Alcantara (arts and culture); SPO4 Mercedes Garcia, Magdalena Lambac, Policarpio Nimer and Betty Lourdes Tabanda (community service); Evelyn Ng (business); Ruben Tinda-an (sports); and Helen Tibaldo (media).
Desiree Caluza, Inquirer Northern Luzon

NPA rebel shoots in-law

VIRAC, Catanduanes—An alleged New People's Army member shot his son-in-law suspected of raping his 19-year-old daughter in Barangay Buyo in the capital town last week. A police report said Edieson Arcilla, 29, a laborer, was shot inside his residence by his father-in-law, Noel Magno, with the use of an improvised handgun using M-16 bullets at 7:20 p.m., Dec. 11. Virac police investigators said Magno suspected the victim of having raped Nelsie, Noel's daughter and younger sister of Arcilla's wife. The suspect, allegedly an NPA member whose wife was killed in what was claimed by the Army to be an encounter early this year, fled. Arcilla was being treated at the Eastern Bicol Medical Center. *Fernan Gianan, Inquirer Southern Luzon*

Duterte to vandals: I'll kill you

TOUCH IT, YOU DIE! HAARGH!

DAVAO CITY—The P140-million synchronized traffic signalization project here has started operating on Monday. Mayor Rodrigo Duterte said bottlenecks in areas where the traffic lights were located were expected because of the adjustment period. "It is not yet perfect. We are still adjusting accordingly," he said. Duterte said the city government and project contractor will study how the system would work and make modifications if necessary. Duterte also warned against attempts to destroy any of the traffic signal equipment. "Do not touch these. will really kill if that happens," he said after reports indicated that vandals have destroyed one of the push walk buttons recently installed in Camus St. Duterte said he was thinking of adding personnel to safeguard the equipment.
Rizalene Acac, Inquirer Mindanao

Number of missing fishermen rises to 93

By Gabriel Cardinoza
Inquirer Northern Luzon

DAGUPAN CITY—THE NUMBER of fishermen from at least four coastal towns of Pangasinan reported missing since last week has increased to 93 on Wednesday.

Police said the number increased after they started receiving reports from residents of Agno, Dasol, Infanta and Bolinao towns about their missing relatives. The fishermen separately set out to sea last week but their vessels were battered by huge waves and strong wind.

Police, however, said at least 68 fishermen from Infanta and Agno towns have been rescued since last week.

Fred Castelo, chair of the municipal disaster coordinating council of Bolinao, said three fishermen from his town, who were listed among those missing, were rescued by crew members of a passing vessel and were taken somewhere in China.

They were identified as Victor Campaña, 33; Ramil Lermo, 27; and Mauricio de los Santos, 48, all residents of Sitio Arosan in Barangay Concordia.

On Wednesday, three helicopters, two Navy vessels and several big fishing boats continued to scour a wide area near the Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea for possible survivors, according to Supt. Rey Tamondong, operations officer of the Pangasinan police.

Tamondong said as of 10 a.m. Wednesday, 63 fishermen from Infanta were still missing, 14 from Bolinao, 13 from Dasol and three from Agno.

Ricky Etac, 35, one of the survivors, said they encountered strong winds and waves midnight of Dec. 15 (not Dec. 16 as earlier reported). He said the same conditions at sea remained on Saturday.

Survivor's account

Rescue operations began only on Tuesday after a survivor found the shores of neighboring Sta. Cruz, Zambales and reported the incident to authorities there.

"*Nagulat po kami sa sobrang lakas ng hangin. Parang bagyo* (We were surprised by the very strong wind. It was like a typhoon). But it was too late for us to return to shore," Etac said.

He said they were about 100 nautical miles from Infanta at that time and going back would take them at least eight hours.

Etac said he had encountered the weather phenomenon, locally called "nortada (north wind)," before but "this one is very different."

To prevent their boat from capsizing, Etac said he and his five companions took turns the whole time the north wind was blowing in running to their boat's outriggers to keep it balanced every time a giant wave struck them.

Etac said they decided to sail home Sunday morning and picked up along the way four fishermen clinging to their overturned banca.

Charlito Maniago, barangay captain of the fishing village of Cato in Infanta, where most of the missing fishermen came from, said hundreds of relatives of the missing have been milling day and night at the Infanta town hall, where an operations center has been set up, hoping to hear news about their relatives.

Sad Christmas

"*Malungkot po ang Pasko namin dahil sa trahedyang ito* (We will have a sad Christmas because of this tragedy)," Maniago told the INQUIRER.

He said of the more than 300 banca from his village, at least 200 set out to sea to fish on Dec. 14. Small boats had three to five passengers, while the bigger ones had six to eight, he said.

Maniago said some of those rescued off Zambales were taken to a hospital in the capital town of Iba. Those rescued by a passing United States Navy ship on Sunday and later turned over to authorities in Subic have returned home, he said.

Tamondong said although no dead fisherman has been found yet, a survivor has given up hope that he would still see his 15-year-old son alive.

Tamondong said Alberto Pesodas had told him that he saw his son, Alberto Jr., drown. The elder Pesodas said he failed to save his son because of the strong waves.

In Bolinao, Castelo said the three rescued fishermen's vessel, the Ming I, had capsized.

"It was fortunate that they had a flashlight with them, so the crew of MV Mineral, which was on its way to China, saw them on the night of Dec. 18," Castelo said.

MV Mineral radioed the Philippine Coast Guard detachment in Bolinao and informed local officials about the incident.

China-bound

Castelo said the cargo vessel could not stop in any Philippine port so it took the fishermen to China.

"We asked the PCG to contact the cargo vessel so the three fishermen can be brought back to the Philippines," Castelo said. *With reports from Yolanda Sotelo-Fuertes, Inquirer Northern Luzon*

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INQUIRER Southern Luzon

Editor Jun Bandayrel
Bureau Chief Floreño G. Solmirano

Turning fear into better disaster response

By Andrea Trinidad-Echavez
Contributor

PHOTOS CONTRIBUTED BY OXFAM

INDAY Surapas lost her mother and a brother at the height of Supertyphoon "Reming." She and her six children are staying at the evacuation center in the Banag Elementary School in Daraga, Albay.

WHEN Gloria Donquillo, 39, another evacuee, reached her barangay, her house was no longer there. Along with it perished her three children, mother, grandchild, daughter-in-law and six other relatives.

T*ATAKBO NA NAMAN BA TAYO, 'Nay?* (Are we going to run again, Mother?)" Inday Surapas' 10-year-old son asks every time rain starts to fall.

"*Takot na takot na kami tuwing umuulan* (We have become very scared every time it rains)," said the 34-year-old mother of six, who lost one of her brothers when Supertyphoon "Reming" wrought havoc in Albay several weeks ago.

"We had already been warned," Surapas admitted in Filipino. "But we didn't expect the rains to be that bad. It never flooded before, not even during Typhoon 'Milenyo.'"

And so on the fateful morning of Dec. 1, Surapas went on with her regular routine of selling vegetables at the public market in Daraga town, confident that "Reming" would just be like the others.

Luckily, she got home before the heavy rains poured and managed to bring all her six children out of their house when water started to rise, wading through fast-rising torrents by tying each other to a rope.

Like Surapas, 39-year-old Gloria Donquillo went on with her daily routine, selling sweet potatoes and cassava at the market the day Reming was expected to strike Albay. This, despite vehement warnings from the Barangay Disaster Coordinating Council and the repeated announcements on radio.

"We needed money to buy food," she explained.

By the time she finished selling at about 9 a.m., the rains and winds had become so strong that the roads were impossible to tread. "I couldn't do anything anymore but pray and wait for the rain to stop."

Unfortunately for Donquillo, when she reached her barangay, her house was no longer there. Along with it perished 12 of her relatives—including her three children, mother, grandchild and daughter-in-law.

About 200 other houses in the village were buried in the mud flow.

> 'They were pretty good in planning. [But] no matter how prepared you are, there will really be casualties [in any disaster situation]'

Preparedness

"We didn't lack in preparations," said Cedric Daep, head of the Albay Public Safety and Emergency Management Office (Apsemo). "But the magnitude of the typhoon, especially the rainfall, was just beyond our capability."

Because of Mayon Volcano's unstable condition, evacuation plan in the province has long been in place.

The Apsemo has been touted as having the best disaster response program in the country. It has trained people down to the barangay levels on disaster preparedness and response.

As soon as Pagasa (Philippine Atmospheric, Geophysical and Astronomical Services Administration) declared Signal No. 3 in Albay, Daep immediately informed Gov. Fernando Gonzales who, in turn, called each of the mayors to tell them to evacuate people.

But even without instructions, the barangay disaster coordinating councils knew that once Signal No. 3 was declared, they had to evacuate people in their areas.

People in the coastal areas are to be evacuated first, followed by those in the steep slopes, then those in areas threatened by mud flow, and those living in houses made of light materials.

By standards, rainfall of 3.5-4 centimeters would prompt the Apsemo to raise alerts to preparedness level. At 5-6 cm, people will be evacuated and by 6.8 cm, mud flow can be expected. But in the case of Reming, rainfall rose to a high of 46.6 cm.

"If we didn't evacuate, more people would have died. There was too much rainfall and within an hour, mud flow rose very quickly. When visibility became zero at 5 meters, we already braced for the worst. We knew there would be casualty," Daep lamented.

With zero visibility and rains seemingly far from over, Daep gathered his people and led them to prayers.

Culture, Daep said, was also one of the major factors in the high death toll. Because most of the areas badly hit by the mud flow had never been affected before, people refused to heed evacuation warnings.

"One of the causes of disasters is culture. People just wouldn't listen because they were never affected ever since," he said.

Unfortunately, mud flow passed through the residential zone, which never happened before.

At least 108,000 houses have been destroyed, while 65,913 others were damaged.

Room for improvements

Because of the loss of lives, questions have been raised. Can the Apsemo do more to lessen the impact of disasters such as that wrought by Reming?

"They were pretty good in planning," Josephene Hutton, Oxfam's typhoon response manager, said, referring to the Apsemo. "[But] no matter how prepared you are, there will really be casualties [in any disaster situation]."

Oxfam is one of the international humanitarian organizations helping in disaster response and rehabilitation in Bicol.

Hutton pointed out that in disasters, "risks come from vulnerability, so the risk factors should be addressed to reduce vulnerability."

For instance, most of the houses destroyed were made of light materials. This could be one area the provincial government could look into, especially when they start rehabilitation.

Another area for improvement is the preparedness of households. "There are always individual responses. But how do you maintain good information channels in the barangay level?" Hutton said.

She said the provincial government should take the opportunity to turn the present sense of fear now of residents into something productive to enable them to respond properly to similar situations in the future.

(The writer is a former INQUIRER *reporter and is now a volunteer of Operation Compassion, a Christian organization doing relief and rehabilitation work in disaster areas. She may be contacted through her mobile phone number: 0921-4911805.)*

Massive rehabilitation for Bicol's coconut industry

By Ephraim Aguilar
Legazpi City

COCONUT trees in Bicol suffered massive damage with Supertyphoon "Reming" hitting the region in November.
CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

THE MASSIVE DAMAGE TO coconut trees after three straight typhoons battered the Bicol region in the past three months is seen to limit big coconut industry players here and will have an impact on Bicol's traditional cuisine of vegetables cooked in "gata" or coconut cream.

Josefina Loremia, 50, a vendor at the Legazpi City Public Market has no choice but to almost double the price of the coconuts she is selling now at P15, P18, and P20 depending on the size, saying it has been the highest price tag of the coconut in her seven years as market vendor.

"[With] very little supply of coconuts after the typhoon, I have to increase my prices since the supplier also increased his price," Loremia said.

All 59 million coconut trees were damaged in varying degrees by Typhoons "Milenyo," "Seniang" and "Reming," which triggered mudflows from Mayon Volcano in Albay and buried at least 250 hectares of land planted to coconut, based on initial reports, according to Alfredo Rillo, general manager of the Philippine Coconut Authority (Philcoa) in Bicol.

In Bicol, Camarines Sur had the largest areas planted to coconut followed by Masbate, Camarines Norte, Albay, Sorsogon, and Catanduanes.

The coconut industry contributes 33.4 percent of the regional Growth Domestic Product (GDP) in Bicol.

Rillo said damage from the three typhoons amounted to P1.7 billion if the value of the nut is pegged at P4 each.

He said the cost of damage is 22 percent of the potential annual industry income of P8 billion.

Industry impact

The immediate effects of this massive damage would be felt directly by the 290,000 coconut farmers in the region and indirectly by other small stakeholders in the coconut industry, Rillo said.

"The people who carry loads of copra for money, coal vendors, workers of oil mills and weavers of coir-based products would also be affected," he said.

Rillo foresees that the shortage of raw materials will adversely affect the big industry players in the region, who are mostly in Albay.

"Just in Albay, we have three big oil mills and the Juboken Enterprises in Camalig town, which is now one of the country's major exporters of coir-based products," said Rillo.

Earlier, Justino Arboleda, chief executive officer of the Coco Technologies Corp. and owner of Juboken Enterprises, said they lost about P2 million in sales after "Milenyo," which delayed their exports.

Cocotech is a world-recognized provider of coconets made from cocofiber, a bioengineering technology used for soil erosion control, which are being exported to countries like Japan, Korea, Netherlands and the United States.

Rehabilitation plan

Rillo said they have proposed to the Philcoa central office and to the CIIF (Coconut Industry Investment Fund) Oil Mills Group a P67-million rehabilitation plan which only covers the replanting of totally damaged trees.

There is a P42-million rehabilitation plan submitted to the Department of Agriculture-Bicol, which covers the Philcoa-Bicol's medium-term plan to fertilize the moderately damaged trees and speed up their recovery, he added.

Rillo said the amount would come from the P250 million the DA-Bicol would try to acquire from government funds and the Food Agriculture Organization, an internationally funded organization under the United Nations that provides assistance to agricultural sectors in its member-countries.

The DA-Bicol would also allot P500,000 to provide materials for planting short term crops for worst-affected coconut farmers as an alternative livelihood.

Rillo said another problem was the lack of sources of seed nuts for replanting totally damaged trees since the Samar-Leyte region, which was a potential source of materials after "Milenyo," was also battered by "Seniang" just last week.

Rillo said, the Bicolanos, also have a high consumption of coconut, primarily since delicacies are coconut-based and there are other nonfood applications.

Loremia said market-goers still bought coconut from her despite the big increase in prices simply because food cooked in "gata" or coconut cream is a mainstay on the dining table of Bicolanos.

Damage assessment

- 1.8 million coconut trees or 3 percent of 59 million coconut trees in the Bicol were either toppled or buried under volcanic debris
- 21.7 million or 18 percent of the total were heavily damaged and would require three years or more to rehabilitate; they are at great risk of dying
- 19 million or 17 percent of the total were moderately damaged
- 16 million trees slightly damaged; their rehabilitation to take 1 to 2 years.

Kings collar semis ticket

Welcoat exits with pride

By Musong R. Castillo

Games Tomorrow (*Araneta Coliseum*)
4:35 p.m.—Sta. Lucia vs Coca-Cola
7:20 p.m.—Purefoods vs Alaska

TALL, QUICK AND BRIMMING with the desire to win of late, Barangay Ginebra last night took a huge step toward its target in this tournament.

The Gin Kings ran Red Bull to the ground with a transition game so fluid and choked the life out of the Barako with a defense that was equally unforgiving for a 94-84 victory that gave Ginebra No. 1 seeding in the Talk 'N Text Philippine Cup semis.

Before a raucous crowd of close to 12,000 at the Araneta Coliseum in Cubao, the Kings displayed one of their finest performances so far, taking control early and finishing with a flurry to rise to 13-4.

The victory also shut the door on Red Bull's aspirations of making the semifinals outright while gift-wrapping the No. 2 slot to idle sister team San Miguel as the Barako settled for an automatic quarterfinal berth after winding up with an 11-7 slate.

It was the seventh straight win for the Kings, but Uichico talked as if he still wanted to squeeze something out from his rock-solid squad.

"This (making the semis outright) is not our goal," Uichico told reporters later. "Our goal is to win the championship, win as many games as we can and not take any team lightly.

Rudy Hatfield was at the firing end of the searing Ginebra onslaught, shooting 25 points, grabbing 18 rebounds and stealing three times.

Meanwhile, Welcoat posed a huge challenge against Alaska last night before bowing, 90-96, to end its campaign on a bright note relative to their ugly debut.

Willie Miller scored 24 points and Tony dela Cruz backed him up with 20 as the Aces won for the seventh time in 17 games while closing out the Welcoat campaign at 3-15.

The Dragons were in the losing end of a 102-69 score against the Kings in the inaugurals last Oct. 1.

The scores:

First Game

ALASKA 96—Miller 24, Dela Cruz 20, Cariaso 16, Ferriols 8, Thoss 6, Laure 6, Juinio 6, Belasco 5, Singson 3, Bajar 2.

WELCOAT 90—Reyes 26, Cabatu 19, Mente 11, Lopez 10, Sta. Maria 8, Sagad 5, Baguion 5, Faihl 4, Ibañes 2.

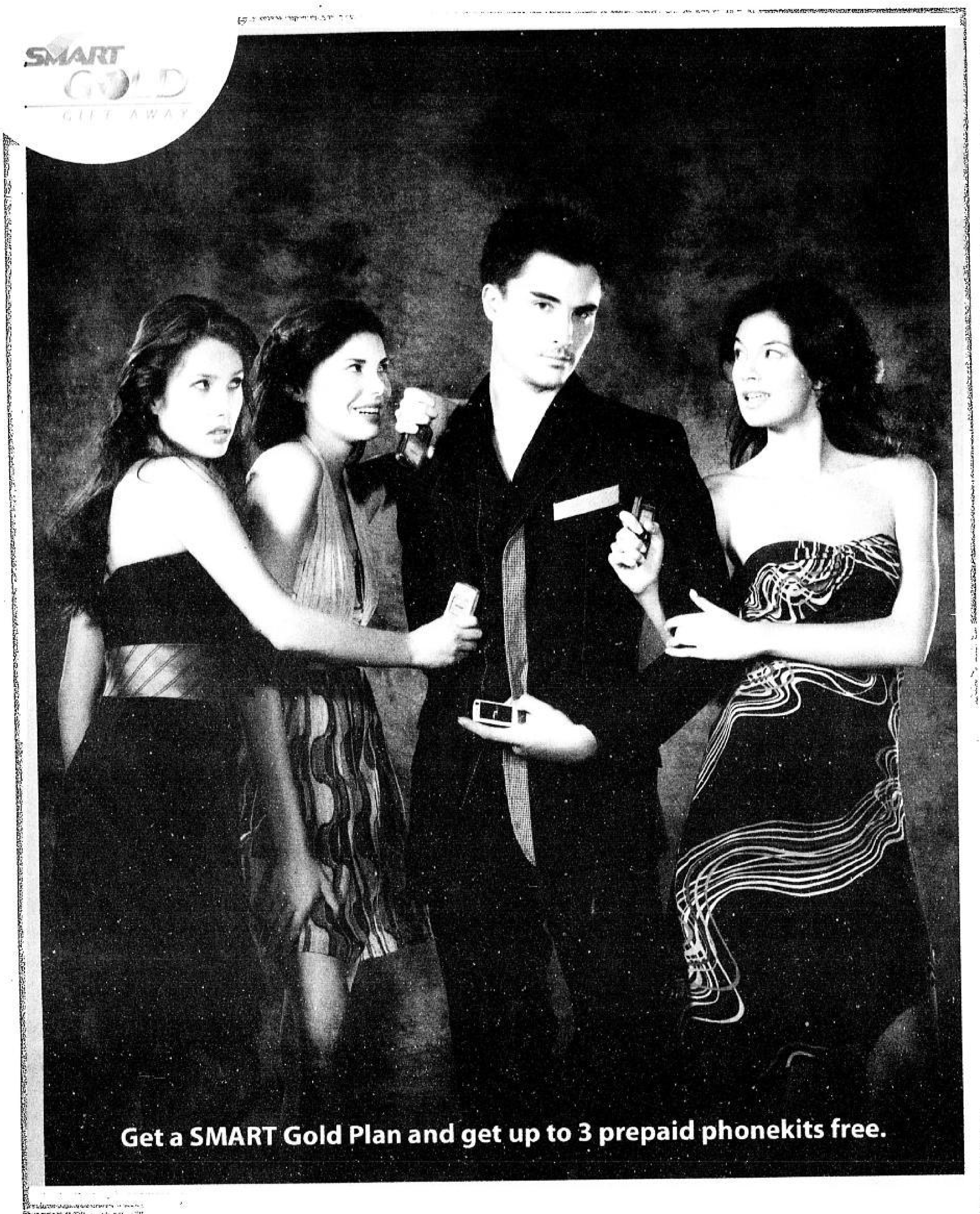
Quarters: 23-23; 47-45; 72-68; 96-90.

GINEBRA 94—Hatfield 25, Menk 21, Caguioa 19, Helterbrand 11, Salvacion 10, Mamaril 4, Reavis 4, Tubid 0, Abarrientos 0

RED BULL 84—Najorda 16, Pennisi 15, Sharma 10, Villanueva 8, Fonacier 7, Valenzuela 7, Bagulo 6, Alvarez 5, Membrere 3, Bugia 3, Robinson 2, Cruz 2

Quarters: 27-20, 53-36, 78-64, 94-84

Late Sports
More stories on A23 to 26



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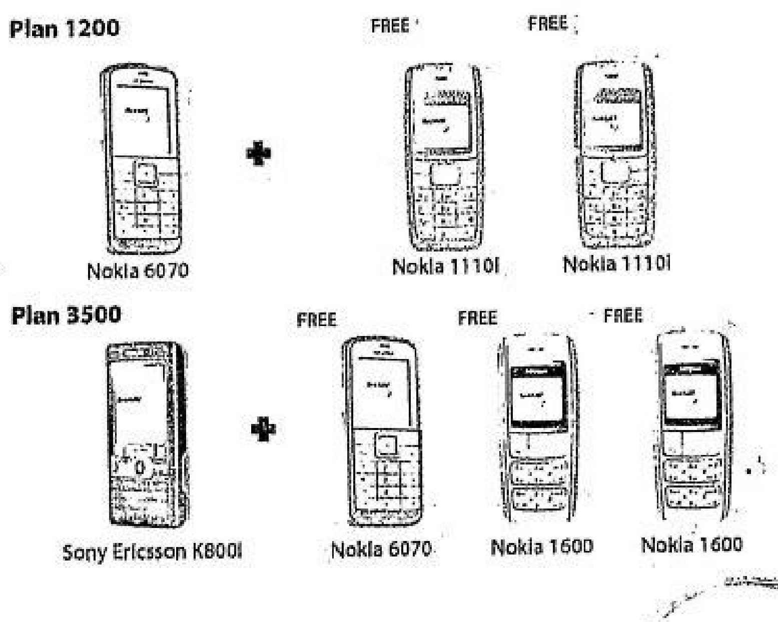

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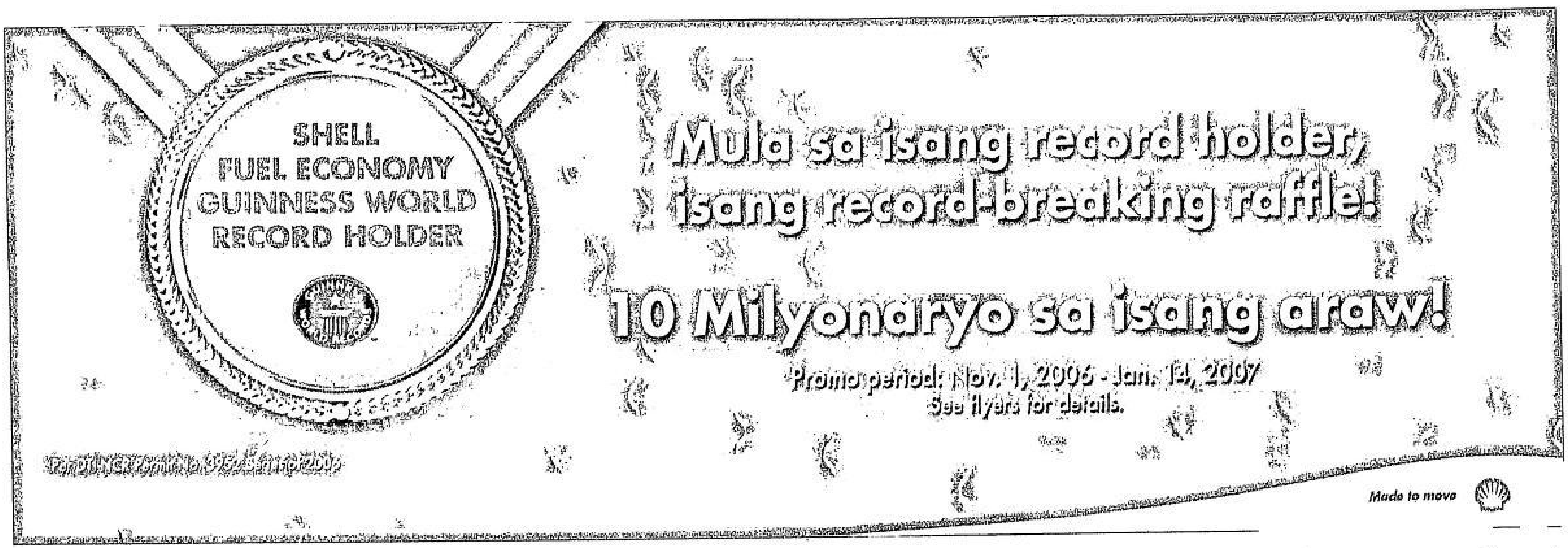
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Actress saves sick ma, loses home in fire

Faulty wiring could have caused blaze; victim's 5 pet dogs casualties

THIS is all that's left of the house owned by the Gutierrez family after a two-hour fire ate up the two-story structure early yesterday morning. RAFFY LERMA

By DJ Yap
and Bayani San Diego Jr.

ACTRESS AND ENVIRONMENT advocate Chin-Chin Gutierrez suffered second degree burns and cuts after a two-hour fire razed her house on Gonzalez Street, Barangay Loyola Heights in Quezon City at 3:28 a.m. yesterday.

Fire officials said the 32-year-old actress jumped from the top floor of her two-story house to get to her bedridden mother, Cecille Arnaldo, who was on the ground floor.

This was confirmed by Anjie Ureta, Gutierrez's manager. "She jumped from the second floor, where her bedroom was, so she could get to her mom's room quickly. She was worried the oxygen tank in her mom's room might explode."

Gutierrez was able to save her mother, a diabetic who has been bedridden for the past two months, with the help of her two house helpers.

The actress, however, suffered burns in the hands and feet as well as several cuts as she scrambled out of the house, arson investigators said.

CHIN-CHIN Gutierrez RAFFY LERMA

Ureta said Gutierrez is now being treated in a hospital for her injuries.

"She's now a little better. But when she was brought to the hospital, she was weak and in extreme pain. The doctors also checked her lungs because they were worried about smoke inhalation," she told the INQUIRER.

Her mother, meanwhile, was confined in the intensive care unit as a precautionary measure. Arnaldo had just gotten out of the hospital a month ago.

According to arson investigators, Gutierrez, her mother and their two house helpers were awakened by smoke coming from one of the bedrooms on the second floor. The blaze quickly spread and damaged Gutierrez's two cars parked on the driveway, said SFO4 Jose Nagpacan of the Quezon City fire department.

"The house was razed to the ground. Even though the walls were made of cement, the flooring of the second story was made of wood so the flames spread fast," he told the INQUIRER.

Nagpacan said investigators had not yet arrived at an estimate of the property damage, but he added that it could run into millions of pesos because of valuables and cars lost in the blaze.

Filmmaker Rory B. Quintos, who had directed Gutierrez in the ABS-CBN series, "Krystala," last year, appealed for help for the actress and her mother.

"They are in dire need of financial help. The entire house was burned to the ground. They weren't able to save anything—not even their pet dogs," said

ACTRESS/ A20

3 bodies found dumped near Quezon City church

By DJ Yap

THE BODIES OF THREE UNIDENTIFIED men believed to be victims of summary execution were discovered on a street and in front of the Our Lady of Victories Church in Quezon City before dawn yesterday.

The bodies bore stab wounds in the chest and slashes around the neck. Nails had also been pounded into their skulls, according to police.

A note with the words "Bukas Kotse/ Basag Salamin" was found atop their bodies, apparently referring to car thieves known to steal parked vehicles by destroying the windshield or forcibly opening the door.

But investigators could not confirm if the murders were actually the work of vigilantes as the note seemed to imply, saying they were still evaluating the evidence.

The bodies were discovered at 3:45 a.m. along Cannon Road near the corner of Betty Go Belmonte Street, Barangay Mariana in New Manila by Mario Paguirigan, a watchman of Barangay Pinagkaisahan, police said.

Two of the bodies were lying parallel to each other, while the third was placed perpendicular to the others, forming a "T," according to case investigator PO3 Romeo Tandas Jr.

The first victim was in his late 30s, about 5'2" tall with a small build, fair-complexioned and wearing a white polo shirt and denim pants. The second was in his early 40s, about 5'6" tall with a medium build, and wearing a white V-neck shirt and denim pants.

The third victim was also in his late 30s, about 5'4" tall with a small build, dark-skinned, wearing a green and black shirt over a white sleeveless top, and sporting the tattooed words "Do or Die/Commando" on his back.

The bodies were moved to the Prudential Funeral Homes for autopsy until they are identified, police said.

Tandas said the suspects most likely stabbed the victims to death first before they pounded at least three nails into their heads and slashed their necks.

He added that the victims had probably been killed in another site before these were dumped near the church.

Bunye kin shot dead in drugstore

By Jocelyn R. Uy

A RELATIVE OF PRESS SECRETARY Ignacio Bunye was gunned down by two unidentified men as he was attending to customers in his drugstore in Muntinlupa City yesterday.

Vergilio Bunye, 52, sustained three gunshot wounds in the head and body. He was brought to the Muntinlupa Medical Center where he died an hour later.

In his report, PO2 Henry Sayson said the suspects went to the Summit Drugstore and General Merchandise on National Road in Barangay Bayanan at 11:30 a.m. yesterday.

They pretended to buy some medicine but as Bunye's assistant started to give them their change, one of the suspects took out a .45 cal. pistol and shot Bunye.

Police said that the victim was the owner of a piece of land in Esporlas Compound in Barangay Putatan, where a demolition took place last year, displacing 17 families.

Muntinlupa police chief Supt. Jose Mario Espino told the INQUIRER that the dispute over Bunye's property could be behind the killing.

"The victim could have stepped on sensitive toes. The suspects could be among the aggrieved party," the official said.

Dolphy grandson faces murder charges for mauling incident

By Margaux C. Ortiz

THE NATIONAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION (NBI) is set to file murder charges against a grandson of comedy king Dolphy, who allegedly mauled to death Jeffrey Vergara, a Tondo resident, on Dec. 4.

Investigators at the NBI National Capital Region (NCR) Office said the suspect, Rowell Quizon, is reportedly the older brother of Nicolo Paulo, who was arrested last month at a rehabilitation center in Taguig City for allegedly killing a factory worker.

Their father was Wilfredo "Freddie" Quizon, Dolphy's son who passed away last year due to injuries he sustained during a fall.

The NBI NCR Office headed by Regional Director Ruel Lasala will also file murder charges against two of Quizon's companions, Marlon de la Cruz and an alias "Phillip," in the Manila City Prosecutor's Office.

NBI special investigator Joey Guillen said that according to witnesses, Quizon threw the first punch at Vergara while De la Cruz hit the victim in the head with a beer bottle.

An investigation conducted by the NBI showed that Vergara, who was celebrating his birthday shortly after midnight on Dec. 4, was drinking with friends outside his home when the suspects arrived.

Vergara's common-law wife, Berna Fernandez, told the NBI that Rowell and his companions greeted the victim.

Then, without any warning, they allegedly began beating up Vergara, who lost consciousness after his head hit the pavement.

Believing that Vergara was only slightly hurt and sleepy after the drinking session, his family waited until the following day before bringing him to the Jose R. Reyes Memorial Medical Center.

Help, however, came too late for the victim who died not too long after the alleged mauling incident.

Motorcycle rams into truck; 1 dead

By Edson C. Tandoc Jr.

A 37-YEAR-OLD AMERICAN ENDED UP DEAD after his motorcycle rammed into the back of an Elf truck carrying boxes of fish early yesterday in Mandaluyong City.

Traffic head Chief Insp. Ulpiano Romero said the victim, identified as Jerome Williams, was not wearing a helmet when the accident happened.

Truck driver Victorino Yolip, 58, voluntarily surrendered to the police after the incident.

Yolip told the INQUIRER he was driving on the eastbound lane of the Crossing flyover on Shaw Boulevard at about 3 a.m. when the incident occurred. He was on his way to the Mutya ng Pasig Public Market to deliver boxes of fish.

He said Williams, who lived at the WackWack Twin Towers in Mandaluyong City according to the police, was tailing his truck on board a Ducati motorcycle.

Between the two vehicles was a taxi. From the right lane, Williams allegedly tried to overtake the taxi but he ended up ramming into the back of the truck, Yolip added.

The victim sustained major head injuries which killed him instantly, Romero said.

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Hospital vows to help NBI probe of organ donations

By Tina G. Santos

AN OFFICIAL OF A PRIVATE hospital in Quezon City vowed to coordinate with the National Bureau of Investigation's probe into the alleged illegal organ donor activities in the institution after a man was arrested last week for reportedly duping a tricycle driver into selling his kidneys.

Arnel Ceriola, security manager of St. Luke's Medical Center, told the NBI that the hospital was willing to coordinate in the investigation to determine if there were doctors involved in the anomaly.

Ceriola told the NBI that as a normal procedure, "doctors should communicate directly with the donors; no transaction shall be made through a middleman." He added that organ donations are screened by the St. Luke's ethics committee to prevent middlemen from engaging in illegal transactions between donors and recipients.

The hospital would soon come up with an official statement regarding the issue, Ceriola said. "This is the first time we learned about middlemen involved in organ donations," he added.

Last week, NBI agents arrested Dennis Permites, of Upper Bicutan, Taguig during an entrapment operation.

Special Investigator 3 Joey Narciso of the NBI National Capital Region division, said the suspect was charged with violating Republic Act 9208 (Anti-Trafficking of Persons Act of 2003) in the Taguig Prosecutor's Office.

"Sec. 4, Paragraph G prohibits one to recruit, hire, adopt, transport, or abduct a person by means of a threat or use of force, fraud, deceit, violence, coercion or intimidation for the purpose or removal or sale of organ of a person," Narciso explained.

There were at least four names of doctors listed in the suspect's phonebook. "But we have yet to verify the doctors' hospital affiliations," Narciso said. "Depending on the results of our investigation, we could recommend the filing of administrative charges before the Department of Health against any doctor involved in the anomaly."

An investigation showed that the suspect acted as a middleman between the organ recipient and complainant Jose Rivero, a 31-year-old tricycle driver from Lumban, Laguna.

The victim was apparently in need of money because he wanted to buy his own tricycle, the NBI agent said.

"He was enticed to sell his left kidney because the suspect promised to pay him P300,000, apart from giving him free meals, lodging and medicines after the operation," Narciso said. "Permites also allegedly told Rivero that the operation would take place at St. Luke's."

While undergoing cross-matching tests with potential recipients, the victim, along with at least six other men who apparently were also selling their kidneys, stayed at Permites' safehouse in Taguig from January to October.

While recuperating at the hospital after his operation last Oct. 10, Rivero claimed he saw the wife of the kidney recipient hand over a thick bundle of money to the suspect.

"The suspect said he would keep the money first because the victim was still recovering from the operation," the NBI said. "But Permites only gave the victim a total of P65,000, saying he had to deduct all the expenses he incurred during the latter's 10-month stay with him."

This prompted Rivero to seek the help of the NBI which immediately formed a team for the entrapment operation.

"We found a folder containing about 40 cases of kidney operations in the suspect's safehouse," the NBI said.

If convicted, the suspect faces a 20-year imprisonment and must pay a fine of P1 to P2 million, the NBI added.

METROBRIEFS

Policeman killed

A SENIOR police officer of the Manila Police District (MPD) was shot to death by unknown gunmen shortly after noon in Manila yesterday. Investigators of the MPD Homicide Section identified the victim as SPO2 Jess Valera of the Theft and Robbery Section. Initial investigation showed that Valera was in a car with his friend Leoncio Bernardo when six armed suspects on board three motorcycles fired at the vehicle at the corner of Ayala Boulevard and Taft Avenue. The suspects immediately fled as bystanders brought Valera to the Philippine General Hospital where he was declared dead on arrival. Bernardo, on the other hand, was not hurt, according to police investigators. Investigators are now determining if the motive for the killing was personal or work-related.

Margaux C. Ortiz

Stabbed to death

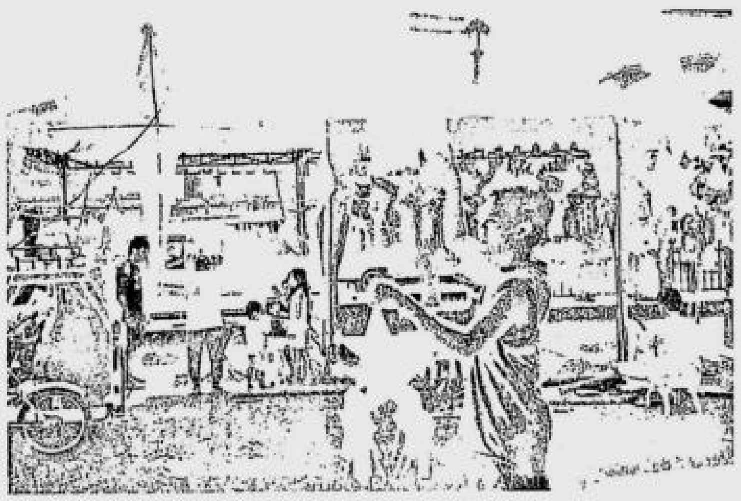
HE ELUDED death once but he was not so lucky the second time. A taxi driver was stabbed to death in a hospital room in Tondo, Manila early yesterday morning. The victim was identified as Rommel Francisco, 30, of 772 Ma. Guizon St., Gagalangin, Tondo. He had been confined at Room 529 of the Metropolitan Hospital after he was shot by three suspects in his left ear on Dec. 10. The victim's wife, Rochelle, said Francisco had gotten into a fight with a certain "Baluto," an alias "Jessie" and "Ongkit." The three men are also suspected of stabbing him to death in his hospital bed yesterday, police said. According to the report of Supt. Ricardo Layug, station commander of the Manila Police District (MPD) Station 2, the incident occurred at around 1:20 a.m. at the Metropolitan Hospital on Masangkay Street in Tondo. Layug said Rochelle woke up to see her husband bleeding from several stab wounds all over his body. Investigators assigned at the MPD Homicide Section are still looking for the suspects.

Margaux C. Ortiz

Mandaluyong's best

TEN Mandaluyong City government employees were recently cited by Mayor Neptali Gonzales II as the city's most outstanding public servants for 2006. The 10 are Claire R. Aventino, Myrna V. Orayan, Julieta Soriano, Godofredo C. Fuentes, Armando A. Austria, Eduardo A. Parada, Ariel A. Nuestro, Rosendo N.Ambrosio Jr., Victoria Lacbayen and Gloria E. Pueyo.

Keeping alive a Las Piñas tradition



THE LAS PIÑAS government has been trying to revive the tradition of *parol* making in the city, which suffered a decline due to Pampanga's flashier products. PHOTOS BY ROGER MARGALLO

IT TAKES years for a *parol* maker to perfect the skill of creating even a simple lantern.

By Jocelyn R. Uy

WITH HIS HANDS, HE SWIFTLY cuts a bamboo stalk into long slender pieces, removes the rough edges and shapes these into a star. He then puts on the finishing touches: adorning it with brightly-colored paper and plastic sheets.

Leonardo Chavez, 24, is one of many natives of Las Piñas who keep the vanishing tradition of *parol*- (Christmas lantern) making alive in the city, where bamboos used for lantern frames thrive on riverbanks and idle parcels of land.

"If Pampanga's Christmas lanterns are attractive at night because of their flickering lights, ours, although simple, are a pretty sight during the day," said Chavez, who learned the skill by watching his father make Christmas lanterns as a child.

The tradition, which became a source of income for his family, was passed on to them by his grandfather, Chavez told the INQUIRER.

Las Piñas' traditional *parol* is a simple star made of bamboo sticks, held together by wire and wrapped in plastic or Japanese paper in happy Yuletide colors—red, green, yellow and white.

Chavez remembered starting out with simple tasks like making the newly-cut bamboo stalks smooth and cutting wires to hold the edges together. Now, he can make 100 lanterns, which are sold from P25 to P100 each, in just two days, he said.

For 59-year-old Renato Reyes, making lanterns is an effective way to lure teenagers and out-of-school youth away from vices. He recalled working at a *parol* factory ran by a relative in Barangay Aldana, the hub of the *parol* making industry in the city, when he was 21.

Every year, especially during the holiday season, he would work at the factory to earn extra money and at the same time have fun with his friends, who also decided to moonlight as *parol* makers.

"So instead of drinking or playing cards, we were being productive but were also having a good time," Reyes said in an interview.

LANTERNS in Yule colors—red, green, yellow and white—sell at P25 to P100 each.

A few years later, he decided to put up his own lantern making business, which has since attracted many customers, especially from Cavite province. To keep up with the demand and also to make sure that they stay off the streets, Reyes has hired poor children in the neighborhood to do the job.

Reyes makes 800 lanterns a year for homeowners, hotel owners and even barangay officials.

"The lanterns are simple yet, they are carefully made. The measurements must be exact. You must have patience and creativity to make them more unique," he said, adding that the skill of *parol* making was not something learned overnight. "It takes years to be able to make beautiful lanterns," he continued.

Recently, the city celebrated the Parol Festival at the Saint Joseph Church, home of the world-famous Bamboo Organ.

"We know how important this is to them. Most of the residents here rely on making Christmas lanterns. We help them market their products to boost their income," said Senate President Manny Villar who attended the event. Villar hails from the city.

His wife, Las Piñas Rep. Cynthia Villar, said that the city has already produced three generations of *parol* makers, whose products are on display in many homes.

Probers eye inside job in payroll heist

By Edson C. Tandoc Jr.

POLICE SAID YESTERDAY THAT the armed men who fled with P500,000 in cash on Tuesday afternoon knew exactly when and where the vehicle carrying the payroll money would pass.

PO3 Carlito Guillarte told the INQUIRER that the suspects had waited for several minutes at the corner of Shaw Boulevard and Pilar Street in Mandaluyong City for the Land Cruiser which was carrying Maribel de Vino (not Divino as earlier reported by the police).

De Vino, the 34-year-old secretary of a construction company, had just came from the Land Bank branch in Pasig City where she had withdrawn P500,000 in payroll money.

"Those who saw what happened said that after killing the victim and taking the cash, two of the robbers ran to the corner and got on a parked motorcycle, where their cohort had been waiting," Guillarte said.

Police have already dispatched several teams to track down the suspects.

Investigators are also determining how the suspects knew that De Vino would be withdrawing money when she was not a regular customer at the bank.

Police, meanwhile, clarified that De Vino was not the mother of the two children who were with her in the Land Cruiser as they had earlier reported.

Mandaluyong police chief Supt. Ericson Velasquez said the two were children of the victim's employer.

De Vino, who had worked for the company for almost 16 years, was not married, he added.

Investigators said that apart from the victim, the two children and company driver Felipe Abergas, 44, the company owner and a helper were also in the van when the robbers blocked the vehicle's path at around 1:45 p.m. Tuesday.

After taking the cash, the robbers opened fire at the van, hitting the victim in the shoulder. The bullet also pierced her lungs.

Bar fight gets NBI agent in hot water

By Margaux C. Ortiz

AN AGENT OF THE NATIONAL Bureau of Investigation (NBI) was nabbed by operatives of the Manila Police Department (MPD) after he allegedly shot the owner of a videoke bar in Manila at around 3:30 a.m. yesterday.

The suspect was identified as Special Investigator III Agapito Gierran of the NBI Anti-Graft Division.

Police said victim Leonardo Mendoza, 53, owner of Bonjie KTV, is now being treated at the Ospital ng Maynila for a gunshot wound in the thigh.

According to Supt. Rolando Miranda, Sta. Ana police station commander, the incident took place in front of the establishment on Francisco St., Sta. Ana.

Mendoza was reportedly closing down his KTV bar for the night when the suspect and several companions arrived. The two later exchanged heated words because Gierran wanted to drink at the bar.

Comments on 'Nicole' case

ON TARGET

Ramon Tulfo

THE ITEM IN THIS SPACE ABOUT Makati Judge Benjamin Pozon and "Nicole," the alleged rape victim in the recently concluded celebrated case (Dec. 16) has provoked varied reactions from readers. The following are some of the many comments sent through e-mail:

* * *

Your article on Smith published on Dec. 16 was an eye-opener to a lot of Filipinos who side with the complainant. I am with you in your views, along with a lot of my female friends. Thank you very much, Sir and more power to you. I would like to ask if you know how I can join those Filipinos who share your views (as well as mine) that Smith is a victim of political grandstanding of the judge. I have heard in the news that there are some Filipinas who are putting up a club or something in support of Smith. If you happen to have their numbers or e-mail addresses, I would appreciate it if you can forward [them] to me as I really want to join them.

Sincerely yours,
—CRISTINA
<saeint@pacific.net.ph>

* * *

Sir, we are of the same mind. How could there have been rape? "*E nakapag*-condom *pa si Smith?* Like Nicole, am also a woman, but what she did is wrong … *ke babae nyang tao*, the height (sic) to go with GIs! Fine, if Smith was her BF *pero hindi eh!* Of course the GIs would presume she was out for some fun! She's of age, she should have been more responsible for her well being! *Tapos aangal-angal siya na nadisgrasya siya.*

—MOPPET MALAPITAN
<muffetmuffet@yahoo.com>

* * *

I am a middle-class mother with two daughters and a son about the same age as Daniel Smith. I think it is Smith who was the victim here and my heart goes out to his mother. What kind of woman will get herself drunk in a bar, flirt with some soldiers, go out with them, and expect not to get molested? *Lalo lang napasama ang imahen ng mga Pinay.* A lot of people I know read your column regularly. We admire you and support you Mon. Carry on. More power to you!

—LEN DAVID,
Dasmariñas, Cavite
<mge_pinay@yahoo.com>

* * *

I was shocked with your position. How can you say those things? *Ikaw pala ang tuta ng mga Kano.* How can you call those Americans allies when in fact *kahit* history *sinasabi na pinagsamantalahan nila ang mga Pilipino. Tulfo, aso ka ng Kano.*

—JONH DALE
<jonhdale@yahoo.com>

* * *

Mon, inamin na ni Smith na nakipagsex siya kay Nicole, so anong kagaguhan mo na sabihing imposibleng mahubuan si Nicole dahil sa masikip niyang pantalon. Magkano ba bayad sa iyo ng mga Amerikano?

—MANUEL RAMILO
<ramilo85635@yahoo.com

* * *

Mr. Ramon Tulfo, you, sir, are an absolute IDIOT. Thank you.

—SONNY MEDINA
<lmedina@villagemarine.com

DID YOU KNOW

VINZONS Hall at the University of the Philippines in Diliman, Quezon City—home of the Office of Scholarships and Student Services and the Philippine Collegian—was named after Wenceslao Q. Vinzons, a UP law graduate who organized the first guerrilla unit in the Bicol region at the outbreak of World War II. He was captured by the Japanese in 1942, and was killed after he refused to tell Filipinos to cooperate with the Japanese. Vinzons was murdered together with his wife, father, sister and two children. Their remains were never found.

Vinzons was student council president at the UP, editor in chief of the student newspaper Philippine Collegian, a member of the 1934 Constitutional Convention at the age of 23, and governor of Camarines Norte.

Cyril L. Bonabente, Inquirer Research

Actress saves sick ma . . .

From page A19

Quintos.

"The first thing she asked at the hospital was if the neighbors and her five dogs were spared from the fire," Ureta said.

She added that investigators are still looking into the cause of the fire. "They suspect it's faulty wiring because it's an old house she inherited from her grandmother."

PO3 Willie Ables of the Anonas Police Station, which conducted a parallel investigation, said the fire reached the third alarm and was put out at 5:18 a.m.

Gutierrez, a mainstay in the ABS-CBN soap opera "Maging Sino Ka Man," is a staunch environmentalist. She received the TOWNS (The Outstanding Women in the Nation's Service) award in 2004 and was honored by Time magazine as a modern-day Asian hero in 2003.

Gutierrez made her acting debut as Maria Clara in National Artist Eddie Romero's TV mini-series "Noli me Tangere" in 1992.

She is a supporter of the animal rights' organization, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, as well as the environmental group Greenpeace.

Libya condemns 6 medics to death in AIDS trial

TRIPOLI—SIX FOREIGN MEDICS face execution by firing squad or hanging after being convicted by a Libyan court on Tuesday of deliberately infecting hundreds of children with the AIDS virus.

The death sentence against the five Bulgarian nurses and Palestinian doctor detained for the past seven years was greeted with shock and outrage in the international community but with cheers by relatives of the victims.

The defendants—from behind bars in the dock—burst into tears on hearing the verdict while the families of sick or dead victims celebrated, singing and dancing outside the heavily protected Tripoli court.

Defense lawyer Othman Bizanti told journalists an appeal would be filed before Libya's supreme court within the legal time-limit of 60 days, in the last recourse open to the medics.

The accused were charged with infecting 426 children with HIV while they worked at Al-Fateh hospital in the Mediterranean city of Benghazi. More than 50 have since died.

All six had pleaded not guilty.

Bulgaria said it categorically rejected the "absurd" death sentences and called on Libyan authorities to intervene.

"The whole court case was compromised and covers up the real cause that sparked the AIDS epidemics in Benghazi," said a joint statement by Bulgarian President Georgy Parvanov and Prime Minister Sergey Stanishev.

The European Union presidency condemned the sentence and appealed for clemency, while EU Justice Commissioner Franco Frattini said he was "shocked" and warned the ruling could damage ties between Tripoli and the 25-nation bloc.

The White House said the United States was "disappointed in the verdict."

The medics, first detained in 1999, had already been sentenced in May 2004 to face a firing squad before the supreme court ordered a retrial following a December 2005 appeal.

And Libya's Justice Minister Ali al-Hasnawi suggested it may not be the end of the case.

"Libyan justice offers the accused the possibility of a complete revision of the case. The supreme court can modify, reduce or annul the verdict," he told a press conference.

Christiana Malinova Valcheva, Valia Georgieva Cherveniashka, Nasia Stoitcheva Nenova, Valentina Manolova Siropulo and Snezhana Ivanova Dimitrova, were convicted along with the doctor, Ashraf Ahmad Juma.

"I am happy with the verdict, which shows the impartiality of the Libyan justice system," Abdullah Moghrabi, lawyer for the families, told AFP.

The court also ordered the Libyan state to pay the families between $250,000 and $900,000 for each victim.

Relatives carried portraits of dead or sick children outside the courthouse as security forces fired into the air to keep the crowd at bay. "Death to the children killers!" read one banner.

Eight-year-old Nuri al-Orfi on Tuesday became the latest victim to die of the disease, according to a family member, raising the overall death toll to 53.

The case has strained relations between Tripoli and the West as the North African state works its way back into the international fold after renouncing in 2003 its efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction.

Defense lawyers argued that the children had been infected with HIV — the virus that brings on Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome — before the nurses began working at the hospital.

In November, British medical journal The Lancet — in an editorial entitled "Free the Benghazi Six" — blasted the retrial as a miscarriage of justice with "no legal foundation."

It cited independent scientific evidence that the infections were caused by bad hygiene at the Benghazi hospital, and reports from human rights watchdogs that confessions had been extracted under torture. *AFP*

NOT TOO OLD FOR CHRISTMAS
Lucia Arias, 91, rests during a Christmas party at the Sara Zaldivar old people's home in San Salvador, Dec. 19. AP

Palestinians agree to new truce, but violence persists

GAZA CITY—DEADLY VIOLENCE FLARED IN Gaza early Wednesday despite a new ceasefire between rival Palestinian factions to stop a power struggle that is threatening to spin dangerously out of control.

Two loyalists from the Fatah faction of Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas were killed in a running gunbattle with fighters from the ruling Hamas movement overnight after the truce was supposed to come into force from 2100 GMT (5 a.m. in Manila), medics said.

Tension continued to reign in Gaza City, with armed men, some of them masked, patrolling the streets. But in the center of the city, shops were opening and city residents continued with their daily routine after four days of internecine violence that has left 13 people dead and dozens wounded.

After appealing for calm in the escalating turf war, both moderate President Mahmud Abbas and Prime Minister Ismail Haniya of Hamas announced a new ceasefire Tuesday.

A previous ceasefire between the factions agreed on Sunday night failed to hold for barely 24 hours, with six people killed in factional fighting in Gaza on Tuesday alone.

Abbas said the new truce had been hammered out after contacts with "friendly countries and friendly leaders," such as Jordan's King Abdullah II.

Officials in Amman had announced earlier that the king had phoned Abbas and offered to host a meeting between him and the Hamas premier to defuse the crisis.

The deadly clashes, which have raised fears of an outbreak of civil war, erupted after Abbas announced on Saturday his intention to call early presidential and parliamentary elections as a way to resolve a months-long standoff with the ruling Islamists.

On Tuesday night, Haniya once again rejected the election plan.

"This call is unconstitutional and risks throwing us 10 years back. We do not accept, we reject this call and insist on the necessity to respect the choice of the Palestinian people," he said.

Haniya's government has been boycotted by Israel and the West since it took office in March after a shock election win over Abbas's long-dominant Fatah, plunging the Palestinian territories into their worst financial crisis. *AFP*

Cheney to testify in CIA leak case

WASHINGTON—VICE PRESIDENT DICK Cheney will be summoned as a defense witness in the trial of his former chief of staff, I. Lewis Libby Jr., on charges of perjury and obstruction of justice, a defense lawyer said Tuesday in federal court. A spokesperson for Cheney signaled that he would not resist the request for his testimony.

The decision to call Cheney was announced by Theodore V. Wells, a lawyer for Libby, whose trial is scheduled to begin next month. Cheney has been a looming presence in the CIA leak case from the start, and his appearance as a defense witness would keep the vice president and the White House in the foreground of Libby's trial. Libby is the only person charged with a crime as a result of an investigation into whether anyone in the Bush administration intentionally leaked the identity of a CIA officer.

The prospect of Cheney's testimony suggested that Libby's trial could be transformed from a narrowly gauged perjury case into a riveting courtroom drama with the taciturn vice president as the star witness. He would testify under oath and be exposed to cross-examination by prosecutors.

Cheney would be the first sitting vice president, at least in modern times, to appear as a witness in a criminal trial, said Prof. Joel Goldstein of the St. Louis University Law School, an authority on the vice presidency.

Although Cheney has been a vigorous proponent of sweeping executive authority, which includes the notion that the president and perhaps other high officials could resist calls to testify in criminal trials involving their official conduct, his appearance may not set precedents, legal experts said.

That is mostly because the Libby case presents a different situation from one in which such officials are subpoenaed to testify, they said.

Cheney appears to have voluntarily agreed to testify on behalf of Libby, whom he has steadfastly supported. It is unclear whether Cheney would appear personally in the courtroom or seek to testify in a less exposed manner like having his testimony taken at the White House and introduced into the trial by videotape.

The trial stems from the disclosure of the identity of Valerie Wilson as a CIA officer in a July 14, 2003, column by Robert D. Novak. The fallout from that disclosure led to an investigation by Patrick J. Fitzgerald, a special prosecutor, into whether the leak violated any laws and whether Wilson's name was disclosed as part of a campaign to punish her husband, Joseph C. Wilson IV, a former ambassador, for his criticism of the White House. *NYT*

US wants liver, stomach warnings on aspirins

WASHINGTON—US HEALTH OFFICIALS said on Tuesday they want more visible side-effect warnings on the packages of over-the-counter pain relievers such as aspirin, ibuprofen and acetaminophen.

Acetaminophen carries a risk of liver damage, while aspirin and other products called NSAIDs may cause stomach bleeding.

Both complications occur in only a small fraction of patients, but can be deadly.

The risks have been known for years, but the US Food and Drug Administration said new warnings could raise awareness among consumers and reduce deaths and injuries.

Tens of millions of Americans take over-the-counter drugs to relieve pain every year. FDA officials said the vast majority encounter no problems if they take recommended doses.

Experts worry, however, that people do not realize the dangers of taking too much or combining the medicines with alcohol. Or they may unknowingly use more than one product that contains the same ingredient and accidentally overdose.

"Consumers have to be more cognizant of what they're taking for pain relief," said Dr. Charles Ganley, the FDA's director of nonprescription drug products.

But consumer group Public Citizen said the FDA's action was "decades late," citing FDA panels that urged new warnings for acetaminophen in 1977 and 2002.

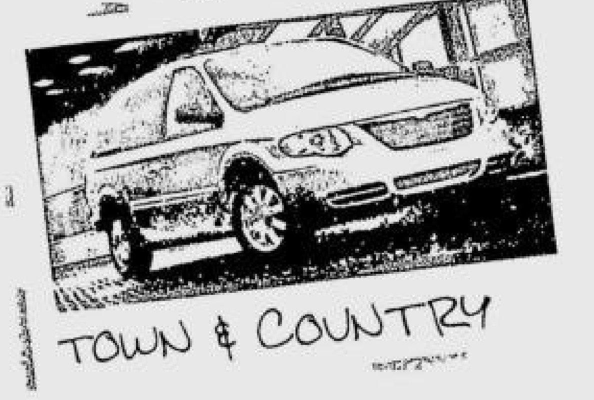
NSAIDs, or nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, include aspirin, ibuprofen, naproxen and ketoprofen.

The NSAIDs and acetaminophen are available in generic and brand-name versions. Acetaminophen, for example, is the active ingredient in Johnson & Johnson's Tylenol. Wyeth sells ibuprofen under the name Advil. Bayer AG makes aspirin.

The ingredients are available in dozens of over-the-counter pain relievers, as well as some cough and cold remedies. Higher prescription doses are also sold.

Ganley said it was hard to know exactly how many people experience serious side effects from the pain relievers. One manufacturer estimated about 200 unintentional deaths a year were linked to acetaminophen.

A widely cited 1999 study linked NSAIDs to 16,500 deaths per year. Ganley said most of the complications from NSAIDs was attributable to stomach bleeding in patients who take aspirin long-term to prevent heart problems. *Reuters*



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Iraq on brink of collapse, says think-tank

A HUMAN skull, with a blindfold still on it, lies on a mass grave of skeletons after they were unearthed June 3 by forensic experts on a shallow grave in a remote desert south of Baghdad. REUTERS

BAGHDAD—IRAQ IS ON THE BRINK OF TOTAL disintegration and could drag its neighbors into a regional war, a leading think-tank said Tuesday, after the Pentagon confirmed violence was at an all-time high.

The warning came amid chaos in Baghdad, where police discovered 53 corpses, including the body of a famous actor, and hunted for kidnapped aid workers and an ex-minister who escaped from jail, allegedly with the help of US hired guns.

The International Crisis Group's report urged Washington to distance itself from Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki's beleaguered government, which has failed to tackle sectarian militias, and reach out to US arch-foes Iran and Syria.

The permanent members of the UN Security Council and Iraq's six neighbors should engage with all the parties to Iraq's spiraling conflict, it urged, while nevertheless holding out little prospect of success.

"Implementation of the various measures mapped out in this report is one last opportunity. It is at best a feeble hope," the ICG paper said.

"But it is the only hope to spare Iraq from an all-out disintegration, with catastrophic and devastating repercussions for all," it warned.

The interior ministry's head of operations, Brigadier General Abdel Karim Khalaf, told AFP that a high-level investigation had been launched into the capture of Red Crescent staff, the latest in a series of mass kidnaps.

"It was repeated, and might be repeated again," he said, linking Sunday's raid on a Red Crescent office in Baghdad to an abduction last Thursday in which several dozen shopkeepers were taken.

In both assaults, a large group of gunmen using security force uniforms, weapons and SUV trucks sealed off a central area of the capital and hauled off dozens of civilians, unchallenged by local law enforcement.

Iraqi Red Crescent secretary general Mazen Abdullah said that 10 more of the hostages had been released on Tuesday, but revised upwards the number known to have been taken, leaving 16 still unaccounted for.

Mass kidnappings have become the latest signature crime of the vicious turf war underway between Baghdad's criminal and sectarian factions, denting public confidence in the police and sowing paranoia.

AFP

Suicide rate among US soldiers in Iraq rises in 2005

WASHINGTON—THE SUICIDE rate among US soldiers deployed in Iraq increased in 2005 after falling the previous year, according to a study by the US Army.

The study said 22 soldiers serving in Iraq and Kuwait in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom had committed suicide, compared to 12 in 2004 and 25 in 2003.

The suicide rate was 19.9 per 100,000 in 2005, substantially higher than the rate in 2004, of 10.5 per 100,000.

The majority of the suicides involved "white, unmarried males under the age of thirty" who were enlisted soldiers of a junior rank. The cause of death in most cases was a gunshot wound.

"The study determined that leading suicide risks factors were relationship issues at home and in theater, followed by legal actions, problems with fellow soldiers and command and duty performance," Jerry Harben of the US Army Medical Command Public Affairs said in a statement.

The suicide figures were part of a study that looked at the mental health and morale of army soldiers deployed in Iraq. *AFP*

$2B a week spent on Iraq war

WASHINGTON—US COSTS FOR the Iraq war will exceed $110 billion this fiscal year, approaching the record reached in the prior fiscal year, a top White House official said on Tuesday.

That amounts to more than $2 billion a week spent on the war.

White House budget director Rob Portman, speaking at a roundtable with reporters, also predicted that strong revenue growth would help bring down the overall US budget deficit, offsetting some of the spending on Iraq.

Asked if he thought the deficit for fiscal year 2007, which began Oct. 1, would come in below the forecast of $339 billion the White House gave in its mid-year budget snapshot in July, Portman replied, "Yes, I do." The White House previously had penciled in an estimate of $110 billion for Iraq war costs in the 2007 fiscal year.

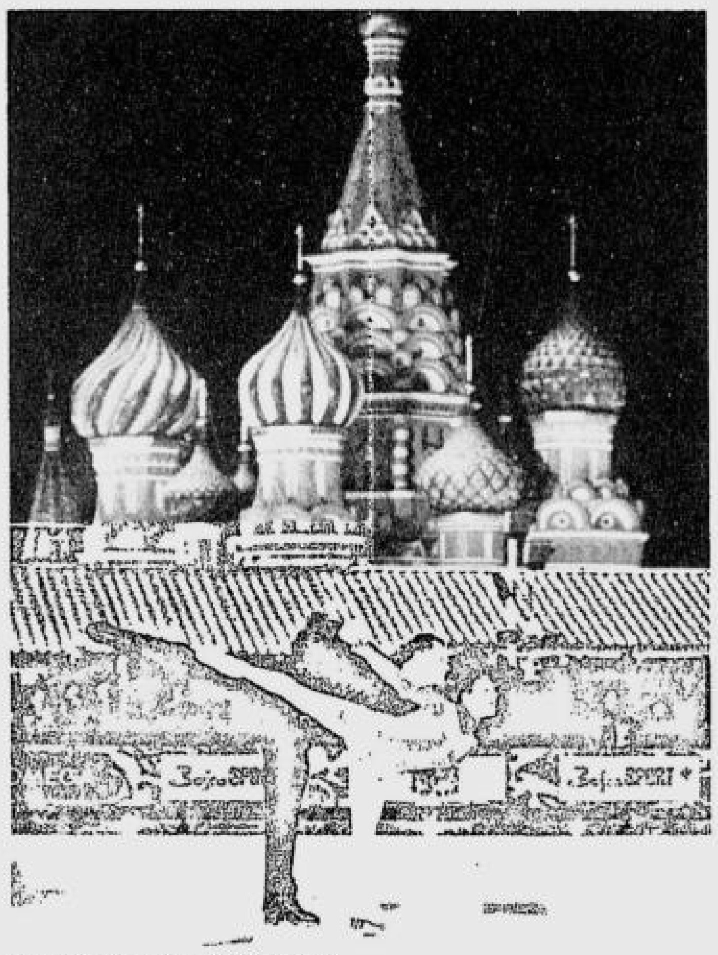
"That number will end up being low," Portman said.

Iraq war spending hit an all-time high of $120 billion in fiscal year 2006 that ended on Sept. 30. Some media reports have said the war costs for 2007 could total around $170 billion. But Portman declined to give a precise figure.

The White House is scheduled to unveil its 2008 spending blueprint in early February. Along with the spending plan, the administration will offer a fresh request for money for the war and will provide updated forecasts for the budget deficit.

Expenditures on the war are escalating even as public support for the conflict falls.

Portman declined to comment on the costs that would be involved if 20,000 additional troops are sent to Iraq in the near future. *Reuters*



RED SQUARE SKATERS

Maria Petrova and Alexey Tikhonov perform during a gala figure skating show in front of St. Basil's Cathedral in Red Square in Moscow Dec. 19. REUTERS

'French had Osama in sight'

PARIS—A DOCUMENTARY SAYS French special forces had Osama bin Laden in their sights twice about three years ago but their US superiors never ordered them to fire.

The French military, however, said that the incidents never happened and the report was "erroneous information." The documentary, due to air next year and seen by Reuters on Tuesday, says the troops could have killed the al-Qaida leader in Afghanistan but the order to shoot never came, possibly because it took too long to request it.

"In 2003 and 2004 we had bin Laden in our sights. The sniper said 'I have bin Laden,'" an anonymous French soldier is quoted as saying.

The documentary 'Bin Laden, the failings of a manhunt' is by journalists Emmanuel Razavi and Eric de Lavarene, who have worked for several major French media outlets in Afghanistan. A cable television channel plans to air the documentary in March. *Reuters*

METRO

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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Police arrest 2nd suspect in UK prostitute murders

IPSWICH, ENGLAND—POLICE PURSUING the killer of five prostitutes arrested a second suspect on Tuesday and seized a car that a neighbor said the suspect had been constantly cleaning.

A court gave police permission to hold the first suspect, who was arrested Monday, for an additional 36 hours while officers scoured his backyard on hands and knees for possible clues.

Detective Chief Superintendent Stewart Gull said both men were suspects in the murders of Tania Nicol, Anneli Alderton, Paula Clennell, Gemma Adams and Annette Nicholls. Their naked bodies were found dumped in rural areas of eastern England around Ipswich, 110 km northeast of London, in a 10-day period beginning Dec. 2.

Police have said the first suspect, a 37-year-old man, was arrested Monday in a village outside Ipswich and the second, a 48-year-old man who lived in the town's red-light district, was taken into custody Tuesday. Neither man has been charged or formally identified.

Britain's Press Association and other media outlets, identified the second suspect as Steve Wright.

Wright worked as a forklift driver and had lived in the area since September, BBC television reported.

The suspect arrested Monday in Trimley St. Martin, 13 km southeast of Ipswich, has been identified in news reports as Tom Stephens, 37, a part-time taxi driver and former special police constable, an unpaid volunteer.

He had been quoted as telling the Sunday Mirror newspaper that he was innocent, but that he knew all five of the victims and had previously been interviewed by police.

"I don't have alibis for some of the times (of the killings), actually I'm not entirely sure I have tight alibis for any of the times. But I'm not worried about being charged. I'm innocent," The Sunday Mirror quoted him as saying.

Police in white overalls, hoods and face masks were seen in the garden of the home in Trimley St. Martin, at times on hands and knees probing the grass with gloved fingers.

Three of the bodies were found near the main road and the rail line between Ipswich and Trimley; the two others were discovered near the same road in areas south and southwest of Ipswich.

Clennell, 24, died of compression to her neck, and Alderton, 24, was strangled, a senior pathologist determined. Post-mortem examinations of the bodies of Nicol, 19, and Nicholls, 29, reached no conclusion on the cause of death.

AP

S. Koreans the most stressed out people in 10-nation survey

WASHINGTON—SOUTH KOREA HAS BEEN through societal upheaval due to its fast development, leading to increased stress among its population—with four in five saying they experience stress on a daily basis, AP-Ipsos polling found.

This starts from a young age, where children spend hours after regular classes in cramming schools to compete on key exams to enter universities, the selection of which can affect their entire lives in terms of future jobs and marriage.

From there, they face rising unemployment due to a lack of available jobs, along with rising real estate costs to find a place to live. Public discontent over the poor economic situation has pushed the popularity of President Roh Moo-hyun very low.

In addition to that, the South remains technically at war with North Korea, which recently stoked regional tension with its nuclear test.

South Koreans experienced the highest numbers of people experiencing stress on a daily basis, 81 percent, among 10 nations polled by AP-Ipsos—including Australia, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Mexico, Spain and the United States.

South "Korea has experienced big changes in a short period in terms of politics, economics and society compared to other nations," said Dr. Ko Kyoung-bong, a professor of psychiatry at the medical school of Seoul's Yonsei University, adding that this leads to high instances of physical and mental disease.

South Koreans were most likely, 33 percent, to name their jobs as the leading source of stress, followed by finances, named by 28 percent. Men were more likely than women to name their jobs, and more than half of young adults between 18 and 34 named their jobs. *AP*

SPORTS

E-mail: pr_sports@inquirer.com.ph

Editor **Teddyvic S. Melendres**

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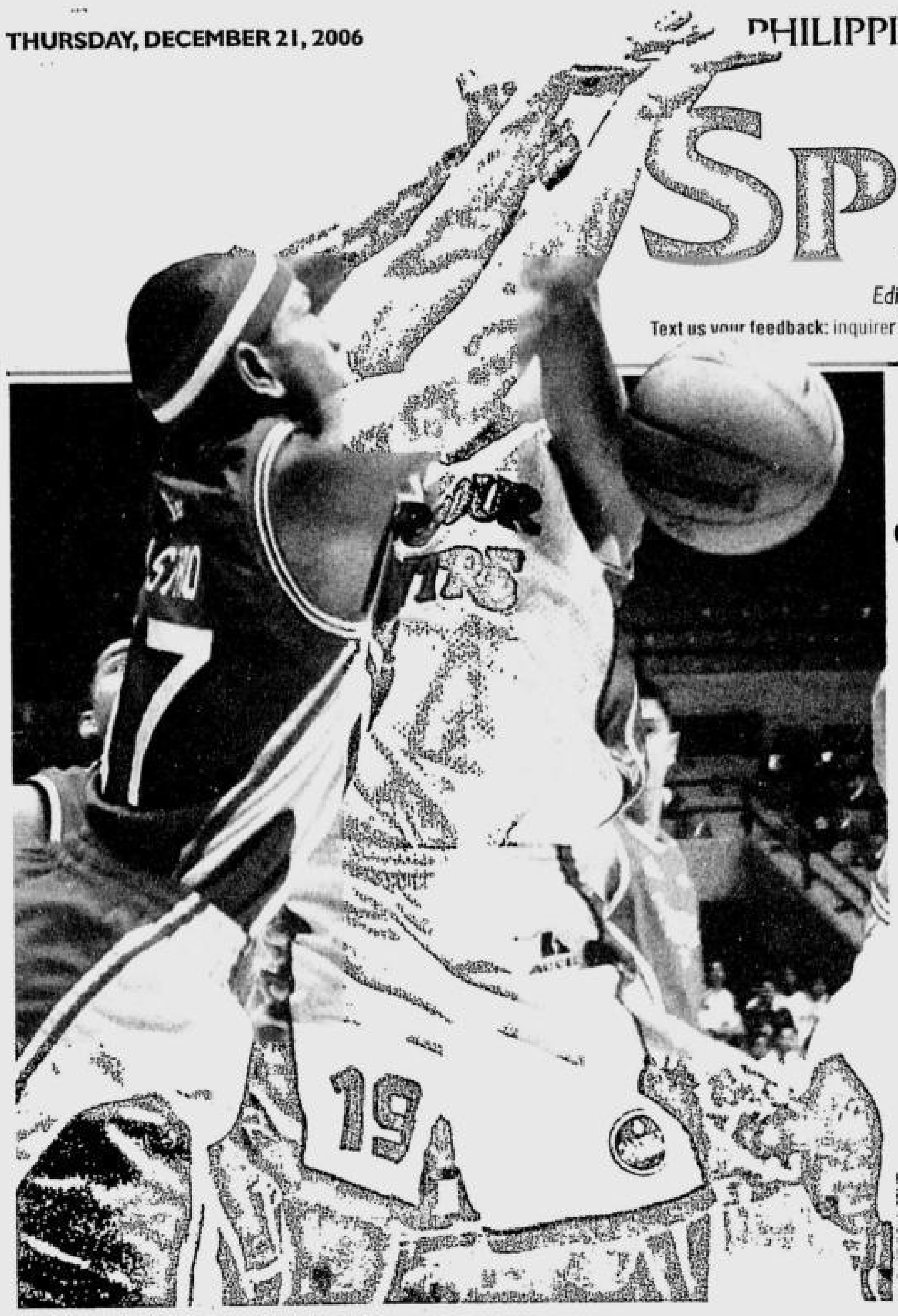


JASON Castro (left) of Hapee-PCU blocks the shot of Al Vergara of Harbour Center.

AUGUST DELA CRUZ

Juntilla rescues Harbour Centre

By Marc Anthony Reyes

REED JUNTILLA DISPLAYED THE brand of game that belied his frame.

The 6-foot-1 guard exploded for 24 points yesterday, including the game-winning basket in the final 2.3 seconds as Harbour Centre nipped Cebuana Lhuillier Pera Padala, 75-73, in the 2007 PBL Silver Cup at the Olivarez Sports Center.

The willowy Cebuano clinched a second straight for the Port Masters, who improved to 4-3 and tied Teletech. The Moneymen fell to 3-5.

Juntilla had earlier bungled three attempts, but instead of getting discouraged, even asked that he be given the chance to execute the endgame play.

"He asked for that play so I gave it to him. I knew he could do it," said coach Jorge Gallent. "Thankfully, he did not fail us."

"I really wanted to make up for my misses and I knew that I could do it," said the 22-year-old veteran in Filipino.

UAAP MVP Kenneth Bono scored a twinner off an isolation play against Allan Gamboa for 73-all with less than a minute left.

Harbour called for time and the 6-foot-1 ex-University of Visayas star asked Gallent to give him that last play. Juntilla then got away from Emerson Oreta to deliver the crucial shot.

The Port Masters actually climbed from 11 points down in the second quarter to grab the lead at 43-40 through Juntilla, Jerwin Gaco and Al Vergara.

Harbour Centre even stretched its lead to 60-49 in the third before the 6-foot-5 Bono buckled down to work.

Bono, who finished with 17 points, scored eight of his team's last 10 points as he single-handedly carried the fight for the Moneymen.

The scores:

First Game

HARBOUR CENTRE 75—Juntilla 24, Gaco 9, Intal 8, Ortiguerra 8, Coching 8, Alonzo 8, Alonzo 8, Vergara 4, Araña 4, Gamboa 2, Asoro 0, Williams 0, Capati 0, Raymundo 0, Saguindel 0.

CL PERA PADALA 73—Bono 17, Dela Cuesta 16, Abadia 12, Kramer 8, Yee 5, Escalona 5, Dulay 4, Viardo 3, Oreta 3, Gonzales 0, Mendoza 0.

Quarters: 16-23, 46-43, 63-56, 75-73

GAMES JAN. 6
(Olivares Sports Center)
2 p.m.—Mall & More vs Kettle Korn
4 p.m.—Hapee-PCU vs Harbour Centre

Pacman heads PSA contenders

FROM MANNY "PACMAN" PACQUIAO, Ronnie Alcano to Leo Oracion, just about everybody who made 2006 a bumper crop for Philippine sports stands as a strong contender for Athlete of the Year honor.

The three, along with eight others, are the frontrunners for the top award to be handed out by the Philippine Sportswriters Association in its Annual Awards next month.

Pacquiao, a three-time Athlete of the Year winner, is again in contention for the award along with Alcano and fellow cue artist Efren 'Bata' Reyes, bowler Biboy Rivera, Oracion and fellow Mt. Everest conquerors Pastor Emata and Romy Garduche, and Doha Asian Games gold medalists Antonio Gabica, Joan Tipon, Violito Payla and Rene Catalan.

Last year, Team Philippines was the recipient of the PSA's highest award after emerging as overall champion for the first time ever in the Southeast Asian Games.

"This is the first time in a long while that a long list of contenders is vying for the Athlete of the Year award. It's a clear proof that Philippine sports is very much alive," said PSA president Jimmy Cantor.

The 28-year-old Pacquiao, feted as Athlete of the Year from 2002-04, won all his three fights this year, including two sensational knockout victories over legendary Mexican warrior Erik Morales.

Alcano's bid is bolstered by his inspiring triumph in the World Pool Championship held in the country for the first time last month.

Given up for dead after losing his first two matches in the group stages, the 34-year-old cue artist from Calamba, Laguna, made it to the knockout stage at the last minute and went on a roll, beating seeded players along the way and capping his Cinderella story with an 17-11 upset of former champion Ralf Souquet in the finals.

Reyes was among those whom Alcano defeated in his World Pool title run, but the 51-year-old billiards Hall-of-Famer is making a strong case for himself on account of his spectacular victories in the inaugural World Cup of Pool in South Wales, the San Miguel Asian 9-Ball Tour and the IPT World 8-Ball Championship in Las Vegas.

In winning the 8-ball title at the expense of American Rodney Morris, Reyes won $500,000, the biggest ever prize purse in the history of the sport. Reyes was the recipient of the Athlete of the Year award in 1999 and 2001.

Rivera is the latest bowler to contend for the award following his scintillating triumph in the World Men's Bowling Championship in Busan, South Korea.

BEN Arda: Lasting legacy

Golf great Bantam Ben Arda dies, 77

By Musong R. Castillo

BEN ARDA, THE FOREMOST Filipino pro in the '60s and '70s, passed away yesterday due to a lingering illness. He was 77.

A former caddy at the Cebu Country Club, the 5-foot-5 Arda emerged from the shadow of six-time Philippine Open champion Celestino Tugot to become the king of Philippine fairways as the mighty Bantam Ben.

He won the Philippine Open three times (1961, 1963 and 1979) and went on to become Asia's top parbuster by capturing the Asian Golf Circuit championship, now known as the Asian Tour's Order of Merit, in 1970.

He was the first Filipino to qualify for the US Masters and British Open and played with American stars Billy Casper and Gene Littler in the Manila Golf Club leg of Shell's Wonderful World of Golf series in 1969.

A veteran of many World Cup campaigns, Arda and Tugot were inducted by the Philippine Sportswriters Association to its Hall of Fame on Jan. 9, 2004.

After his retirement, Arda became a much-sought teaching pro until a stroke interrupted his new calling. But he recovered and resumed giving golf lessons before he became a regular teacher at the Alabang Country Club driving range.

Alabang golf course manager Caloy Coscolluela said yesterday that Arda suffered another attack on his way to the driving range Tuesday morning and died at the Ayala Alabang clinic. His body lies in state at the Holy Trinity Chapel in Alabang. Interment details will be announced later.

Pacquiao-Barrera looms bigger

A POSSIBLE MANNY PACQUIAO-MARCO Antonio Barrera rematch looms bigger by the day as other alternative match-ups have either yet to be firmed up or are not altogether possible.

The other day, Japan's Akihiko Honda revealed that his fighter, the undefeated World Boxing Association (WBA) super featherweight champion Edwin Valero, is not yet ready to face Pacquiao in 2007, effectively putting to rest speculations that Pacquiao may face Valero in Macau this March.

Yesterday, the camp of Juan Manuel Marquez announced that a fight with Barrera has not yet been discussed, giving rise to the possibility that, indeed, the Filipino icon might face Barrera next.

Ignacio 'Nacho' Beristain, who trains and manages Marquez, told Boxingconfidential that Golden Boy Promotions, which promotes both Barrera and Marquez, has yet to call him about a possible showdown between the two warriors.

PACQUIAO

BARRERA

"We have not yet been contacted by Golden Boy Promotions about a fight with Marco Antonio Barrera. It is a fight we welcome, but we have not heard a thing," Beristain said. "We take it all as speculation," the trainer added.

Barrera versus Marquez is the alternative fight being put on the table should a Pacquiao-Barrera bout does not materialize.

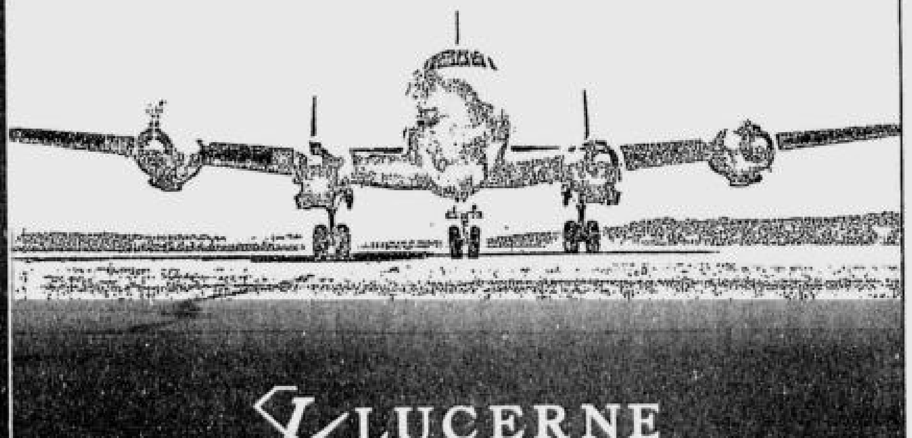
The Filipino ring icon is currently embroiled in a legal tussle between Oscar De la Hoya's Golden Boy Promotions and Top Rank's Bob Arum after the pound-for-pound superstar signed both contracts presented to him by the two warring promotions.

However, renowned trainer Freddie Roach, who commands an enormous respect from Pacquiao, has indicated that Golden Boy presents the best opportunity for Pacquiao, and a Barrera fight is the biggest available for the Filipino southpaw.

Meanwhile, Beristain also revealed in the same interview that should an opportunity presents for him to train Oscar De La Hoya for the May 5 bout with Floyd Mayweather, he would not hesitate to do the job, "not for the money, but for the honor of working with a fighter of Oscar's caliber."

Roach, who is also in the running as De La Hoya's next trainer, could not be reached for comment as he is currently in Gen. Santos City. *Salven L. Lagumbay, contributor*

BREITLING
NAVITIMER WORLD



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So stuns Dimakiling, grabs solo lead

Individual standings: (Open section)
4.0 points—IM Wesley So; **3.5 points**—GM Mark Paragua, GM Nelson Mariano II, IM Darwin Laylo, FM John Paul Gomez, NM Oliver Barbosa; **3.0 points**—IM Oliver Dimakiling, IM Ronald Dableo, FM Fernie Donguines, FM Emmanuel Senador, FM Jan Emmanuel Garcia, FM Julius Joseph de Ramos, NM Rudy Ibanez, NM Rustum Tolentino, Jerome Balico, Paulo James Florendo

RISING STAR WESLEY SO BEAT fellow grandmaster-candidate Oliver Dimakiling in the fourth round yesterday afternoon to grab the solo lead in the 2nd Rep. Prospero Pichay Jr. Cup National Open Championship and Chess Challenge at the SM City in Manila.

So, the youngest Filipino IM at 13, prevailed with white after 67 pushes of a Philidors Defense to post his fourth straight victory in as many rounds. "I'm just lucky to beat Kuya Oliver (Dimakiling)," said So in Filipino. "It's hard to tell what will happen (in this tournament) because the scores are close."

"This tournament is a good preparation for my stint in the Singapore Masters starting Dec. 26," said So, who got his first GM result in Badweisee, Germany, last month.

So, who beat PCU-Taft head coach Raymond Salcedo in the third round, is scheduled to face top-seeded GM Mark Paragua in the fifth round evening session.

WESLEY SO

The 22-year-old Paragua, the country's top-ranked player with an Elo of 2587 beat IM Petronio Roca in the third round then halved the point with fellow GM Nelson Mariano II in the fourth round.

Paragua is also scheduled to lay in the Singapore Masters.

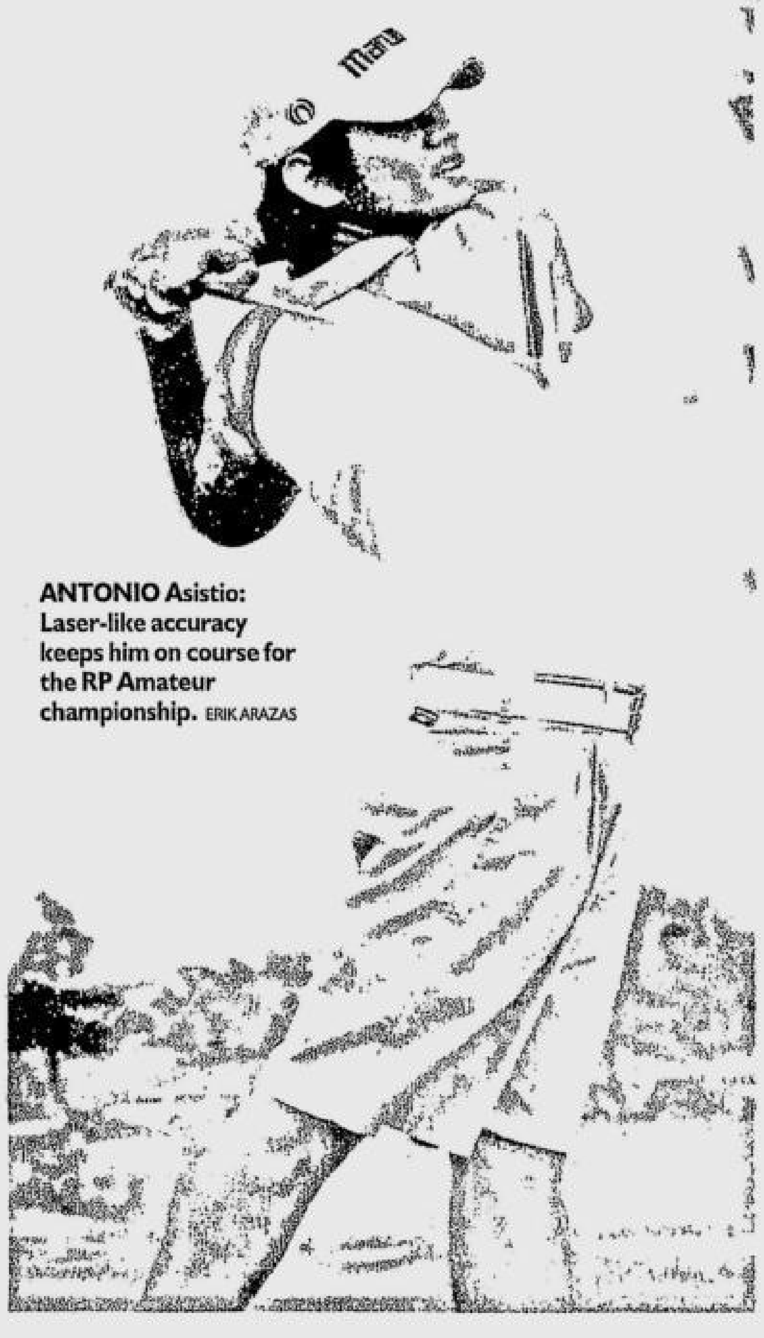
Mariano, the former Asian junior champion, beat National Master Hecky Unding in the third round.

Paragua and Mariano raised their total to 3.5 points and climbed into a tie for 2nd to 6th places with IM Darwin Laylo, Fide Master John Paul Gomez and NM Oliver Barbosa.

Laylo, 26, who finished eighth in the rapid competition of the 15th Asian Games in Doha, drew with Gomez in the third round then toppled NM Rolando Nolte in the fourth round. Gomez, 22, shocked IM Yves Rañola in the fourth.

Barbosa, on the other hand, outplayed WNM Loreshyl Cuizon in the third then upset IM Richard Bitoon in the fourth, in this six-day event.

In the Challengers section, five non-masters shared top spot with 4.0 points each. They are Merben Roque, Julius Sinangote, Allan Macala, Manny Yu and Marlon Ricafort. *Marlon Bernardino*


ANTONIO Asistio: Laser-like accuracy keeps him on course for the RP Amateur championship. ERIK ARAZAS

Asistio, other seeds rip foes; Piccio tumbles

By Musong R. Castillo

CANLUBANG, LAGUNA—FIRING AT PINS with laser-like accuracy, young top seed Tonlits Asistio outclassed veteran Joel Opaco, 5 and 4, yesterday to barge into the second round of the RP Amateur championships' match play stage at the exclusive The Country Club here.

The former Philippine pool member hardly encountered problems in bundling out the Del Monte mainstay Opaco, but the top seed in ladies' play, the youthful and bubbly Mia Piccio, was shown the door by an obscure bet.

Piccio, runner-up to Frances Bondad last year in Bacolod, lost 1-up to Ting Ting Cao, who survived the qualifying by the skin of her teeth.

Jay Bayron, the No. 2 seed, was also unforgiving in bundling out Asian Games teammate Gene Bondoc, 4 and 3, to keep a potential quarterfinal clash with Marvin Dumandan alive.

Dumandan, the 26-year-old whom many feel is long overdue to win this event, had an easy time against Lorenzo Patnogon, 5 and 4, to move up against the dangerous Boyet Saragoza, the former Canlubang Open champ who ousted first National Caddies' Open winner Jonel Ababa, 2 and 1.

Bayron next tangles with Edmund Au of Malaysia, a 1-up winner over jungolfer Marcel Puyat even as Korea's Kim Chang-hoi took out No. 2 Louie Dacudao, 3 and 2, to earn a second round clash with Michael Bibat.

Bibat, winner of the individual bronze in the Doha Asian Games, still groped for form but still found a way to take out fellow Southwoods mainstay Jong Laput, 1-up.

Thirteenth-seeded Korean Young Ho-sim posted a disputed 1-up victory after 20 holes over Mario Labajo in a bitterly contested match.

A former caddy at Matina in Davao who ousted top seed Artemio Murakami in the quarterfinals last year at the Marapara, Labajo, then enjoying a 2-hole lead, called the attention of the Korean for pressing his ball with his putter on the 10th green to prevent it from rolling downhill.

Officials of the match found nothing wrong with the Korean's action, but other rulesmen consulted later disagreed.

Caloy Coscoluella, head of the rules committee of the organizing National Golf Association of the Philippines, said Young's action deserved a two-stroke penalty in stroke play or the loss of the hole in match play.

However, Coscolluela admitted he was not around when the infraction took place.

Boy Blue Ocampo, a rulesman with the Asian Tour, agreed with Coscoluella but added that a protest should have been filed before the flight stepped off the green in question.

Also advancing were Miko Alejandro, Dante Becierra and Anthony Fernando. Alejandro outlasted Iggy Clavecilla, 3 and 2; Becierra tripped Korean Kim Dong Ook, 2 and 1; and Fernando bowled over Tuan Nguyen, 4 and 3.

Mark Fernando downed Wolen Superal, 5 and 4 to advance, while Taiwanese Cho Tsung-lin, ripped Joseph Labajo, 3 and 2.

In ladies play, former RP Open winner Carmelette Villaroman prevailed over Paulina Sotto, 2-up; Ainil Abu Bakar of Malaysia nipped Linnel de Villa, 1-up; Melissa Loh of Singapore, who outlasted Chihiro Ikeda of Japan, 1-up, after 19 holes; and Asian Gamer Anya Tanpinco, who scored a walkover win over Lora Roberto.

San Andres climbing motocross zenith fast

IF ANYTHING, THE RECENT 2006 Supercross International Championship Series affirmed Kenneth San Andres' status as motocross' future superstar.

SAN ANDRES

The 16-year-old San Andres, who has reaped accolades from both the Philippine Sportswriters Association (PSA) and the Sports Communicators Organization of the Philippines (Scoop), finished second to Revtex teammate Glenn Aguilar in both the Pro Open and Pro 125 divisions of the national series.

But what makes the feat all the more impressive is the fact that San Andres took part in the premier pro open and 125 classes for the first time, making the big jump from the kiddies' categories into the big league only this year.

"Kenneth has shown that he belongs with motocross' top guns," said Kenneth's father Jun-Jun, himself a winner of the Supercross' Veterans' Class of the series sanctioned by the National Motorcycle Sports and Safety Association (Namssa). "His feat is amazing because he even upstaged many of the grizzled veterans who are almost twice his age."

San Andres, a student of Manila Central University who is backed by Caltex Revtex, Oakley, HJC Helmet, Bridgestone Tires, KTM, 2Go, Fox, Renthal, Alpine Star, Polisport, Inside Racing and JBS Motorcycle Parts and Accessories, will undoubtedly be one of the motocross scene's most anticipated acts in 2007.

"This season is an awesome experience for Kenneth because he was, at first, able to keep up with the best. Now, he's one of them," added Jun-Jun.

San Andres' rapid rise can be attributed to the training he underwent last year under famed coach and former world motocross champion Jim Gibson.

But the elder San Andres said it's more than just world-class training.

"Kenneth's inherent riding skills and the kind of learning that is infused into him are a given. What really makes him a cut above the rest is his dedication to his craft.

"You don't have to push him to train, he knows what to do and that makes him ultra special," said Jun-jun.

SPORTSWATCH

Jungolf anniversary tilt at Riviera

THE 31ST JUNGOLF ANNIVERSARY TOURNAMENT WILL BE HELD TOMORROW at the Couples course of The Riviera Golf & Country Club and Riviera Sports Club in Silang, Cavite. A shotgun tee off at 8 a.m. has been scheduled for the participants in Classes A, B, C, D and alumni at Riviera-Couples and Classes E and F at the Riviera Sports Club. The top three finishers in each division will win trophies and other special prizes. Entry fees are P1,000 for alumni and P500 for jungolfers. Please call 893-9599 or 09178841436. Meanwhile, Regina de Guzman recently placed third in the 2006 Greg Norman Junior Masters in Australia.

Cainta cockfest draws 250 entries

ABOUT 250 SMALLTIME COCKERS AND BREEDERS OF RIZAL AND METRO Manila converge today at Cainta Fair Center Coliseum as the Super Fastest Win One-Cock Ulutan fires off at 7 a.m. Host Sam Mendoza pegged the entry fee at P1,800 and minimum bet P3,300. The fastest win champion will receive P45,000 plus a brand new motorcycle worth P45,000, while the winning handler and gaffer will receive P7,000 and P3,000, respectively. For the second placer, P20,000 and brand new motorcycle. His handler and gaffer will receive P4,000 and P2,000, respectively. The third to 30th placers will also receive prizes. The first 10 winners and last 10 winners will get P2,000 each as bonus. For inquiries, contact 655-3334, 240-0979 or 0928-6316711 (Arnold Amores). Also slated at CFCC is the New Year Encounter 4-Cock Derby on Dec. 29 with a guaranteed prize of P500,000 and a brand new motorcycle for the fastest kill champion. Entry fee is P11,000 and minimum bet P5,500.

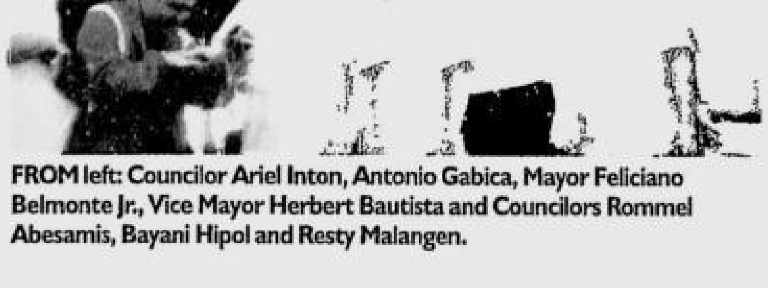
Fastest Win event at Las Piñas today

THE FASTEST WIN ONE-COCK TIMBANGAN TAKES CENTER STAGE AT LAS Piñas Coliseum today with more than 150 participants from Muntinlupa, Parañaque, Pasay, Las Piñas, Batangas, Cavite and Laguna taking part. Registration is from 7-11 a.m. Fights start at noon, according to hosts Bobot Pumoy, Munding Elicanal and Bernie Silva. The fastest win champion will be selected after every 10 fights, and will receive P10,000 while the second and third placer get P5,000 each. In a related development, 50 participants gird up for battle in the Christmas 4-cock derby on Saturday with coliseum manager Alex Tobias and RC Sayaman as hosts. Entry fee is P8,800. Interested parties may call 873-1040 and 874-3910 or 0926-7450375 (Julius).

Salpukan derby resumes Saturday

THE BLOCKBUSTER P3M PAMASKONG SALPUKAN 6-COCK DERBY RESUMES at Makati Coliseum this Saturday, featuring the fifth round eliminations. Fifty participants will battle it out, while the remaining 50 entries compete on Dec. 27. All qualifiers (1, 1.5, 2, 2.5 and 3 points) will clash on Dec. 30. Out of 157 cockers and breeders who saw action, 16 have reached the finals unbeaten with three wins each. The latest three pointers from Monday's round were Tony Lasala, Efren Canlas, Gov. Ito Ynares and SPDR entry. Jackpot prize is P3 million, according to promoters Lito Orillaza, Rudy Salud and William Co of WTJ Sports and Amusement Corp. For reservation of cockhouses, call 896-3545 and 895-6475 (Joan or Stephanie).

Quezon City honors Gabica, pledges support


FROM left: Councilor Ariel Inton, Antonio Gabica, Mayor Feliciano Belmonte Jr., Vice Mayor Herbert Bautista and Councilors Rommel Abesamis, Bayani Hipol and Resty Malangen.

FOR BRINGING HONOR TO THE COUNTRY, particularly Quezon City, the Quezon City council and employees honored Asian Games hero Antonio Gabica on Monday.

The 34-year-old Gabica, winner of the 9-ball singles event and silver medalist in the 8-ball singles, was feted by Mayor Feliciano Belmonte Jr., Vice Mayor Herbert Bautista, Majority Floor Leader and 4th District Councilor Ariel Inton and Councilor Bayani Hipol during the flag-raising ceremony in front of the City Hall.

"You made not only Quezon City very proud but our country the Philippines as a whole," Belmonte told Gabica, who is residing at the 4th District in Teacher's Village. "You showed to our Asian neighbors that Filipinos can excel in any sports arena."

"His outstanding performance in billiards event, capturing gold and silver, has given an exemplary honor to Quezon City," added Bautista.

Gabica was accompanied by his wife Jean, Bugsy promotion head businessman/sportsman Ceferino "Perry" Mariano and BPLO head Pacifico Maghako. Inton, for his part, said Gabica is a product of good and comprehensive sports management program. *Marlon Bernardino*

Passive Guiao, fiery Barakos

IN HUDDLE

Beth Celis

IT WAS SUPPOSED TO BE AN ACT OF protest—the "sit-down" strike staged by Red Bull coach Yeng Guiao during the Red Bull-Purefoods game at the Araneta Coliseum last Sunday.

The protest was against the Dec. 5 memo issued by PBA commissioner Noli Eala to all PBA teams severely restricting the professional conduct on court of players and coaches like Yeng.

"That memorandum was not necessary. As it is, the officials already have so much power," Yeng had commented on the eve of the game.

The new guidelines stated that acts such as running up and down the sidelines after a call or non-call, making faces and hand signals, shouting with or without invectives, incessant clapping or pointing at an official, among others, will be dealt with more sternly from thereon.

"I'll do exactly as he wants," Yeng said. "Let's see if the spectators don't die of boredom."

Yeng disclosed that he had designated one of his assistants to keep a close tab on him—to rein him in so to speak—to ensure that he accomplishes what he set out to do.

"*Kasi baka mapatalon ako o mapasigaw* instinctively, I need somebody to remind me not to react."

Yeng had also advised his players not to misinterpret his strange demeanor.

"I explained to them that even if I look and act passive and indifferent, it does not mean that I'm disinterested in the game. I told them to play their hearts out. Regardless of how I behave. *Sabi ko sa kanila*, this is just my way of adhering to the new memorandum."

True enough, Yeng was practically motionless during last Sunday's game, as he kept his butt glued to the bench, his fingers muzzling his lips. He maintained a completely blank expression on his face practically all-game long.

The Barakos won, 112-92.

* * *

The day after, I called Yeng to congratulate him for the victory and for successfully carrying out his resolve. Although his assistant had claimed that he stood up twice, he said he remembered doing it only once, when another fracas between Topex Robinson and Roger Yap threatened to erupt.

How did it feel to be in a straight jacket?

"I felt different, I felt weird. It wasn't me. Because everything was bottled up, I felt that I just might suddenly explode," Yeng said.

He admitted though, that there was an upside to the whole exercise.

"*Maganda ang naging* effect. *Maganda ang* game, *maganda ang laro ng* team. *Siguro dahil mas* relaxed *ang* players," he said.

Yesterday, Yeng's Barakos were scheduled to go up against Barangay Ginebra in the main game of the day's doubleheader.

If the players are responding well to the "new" Yeng, he feels he ought to retain the new persona.

"I'm more concerned with the effect now," he said. "*Baka talagang kailangan ng ibang* style *naman*."

* * *

After last Sunday's game, the players were each escorted outside the premises by security men.

People loitering by the southgate area said this was to prevent another scuffle among the players who had a heated confrontation during the game.

Other habitués however believe that assigning security men to each player was a means of protecting them from pickpockets who proliferate in that area.

"*Kasi maraming nadudukutan na* players recently, *nawawalan ng* wallet, cellphone," said a player agent. "Talk 'N Text's Don Allado is the latest victim."

"The players should be warned that the pickpockets could be posing as fans. *Kasi madalas*, a group of four or five, *mga lalaki pa*, would be requesting for a photo session, *tapos aakapin pa at gigitgitin ang* player. *Hindi na nila mapapansin kung nadukutan sila*," cautioned the mother of a cager.

* * *

While we're on the subject, should I perhaps warn players, coaches and other cage celebrities about strange text messages being received by their colleagues?

For example, my number appeared in a couple of text messages sent to a PBA coach and a team's liaison officer. I sent neither and was so surprised how my number could have appeared in the messages.

They say the culprit could be a virus or CHIKKA.

RP athletes did good job—Keon

By Marc Anthony Reyes

IT MAY HAVE BEEN THE PHILIPPINES' best Asian Games finish in 44 years, but the Philippine Olympic Committee has yet to make its verdict whether the country met its expectations in Doha recently.

KEON

POC spokesman Joey Romasanta said the POC executive board is still in the process of determining what standard will be used to gauge the recent Doha performance of four gold, six silver and nine bronze medals.

"Where do we assess it? Do we assess it against our previous performance in Busan or according to our target at the start of the Games?" said Romasanta.

He said the POC executive board will come up with an "organized assessment" of the Games after many other factors are considered.

"We will see how we did wrong, or what we did right," Romasanta added.

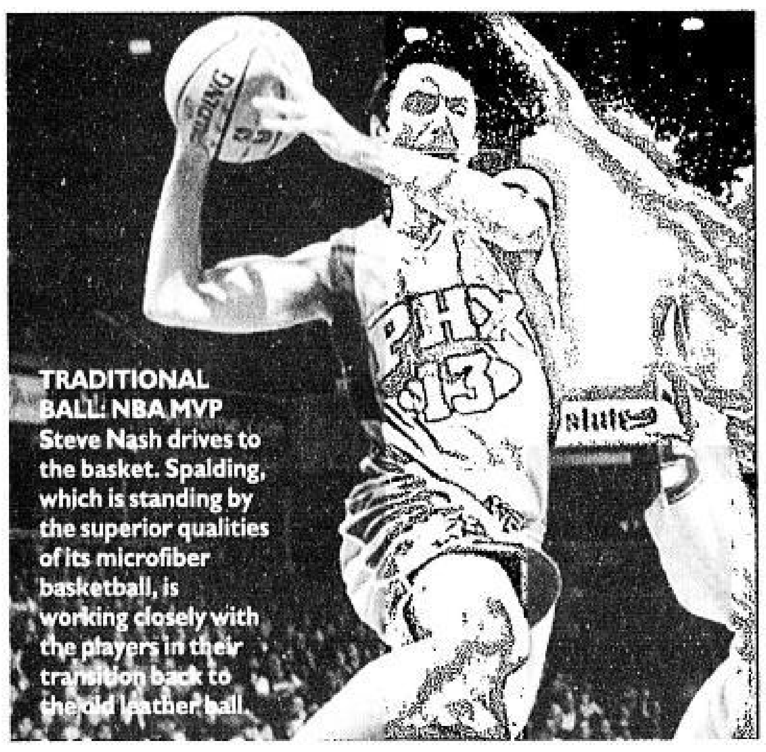
He said the POC will use the Asian Games experience to chart the course to a first Olympic gold medal in Beijing in 2008.

Meanwhile, former Gintong Alay director and 2005 Southeast Asian Games training chief Mike Keon said the country "did a pretty good job" in Qatar.

"Considering that the Asian Games is such a big league and is virtually world class already, the Philippines' winning four golds, six silvers and nine bronzes is a pretty good performance," Keon told the INQUIRER.

Keon noted that the Chinese team which handily won the overall title with 165 golds, had in its roster plenty of "white coaches."

"For a country that is so nationalistic, they are humble enough to admit that their local coaches are not adequate," Keon said. "We can also do it here."



TRADITIONAL BALL: NBA MVP Steve Nash drives to the basket. Spalding, which is standing by the superior qualities of its microfiber basketball, is working closely with the players in their transition back to the old leather ball.

MisOr forces playoff

CEBU CITY—HOLcim Pryce Pharma-MisOr forced a winner-take-all Game Three of the ML Kwarta Padala Mindanao Visayas Basketball Association (MVBA) Second Conference by shocking M. Lhuillier Kwarta Padala-Cebu City, 96-84, at the New Cebu City Coliseum Tuesday. The series is now even at 1-1.

From the onset, it seemed the Jewelers of Michel J. Lhuillier and Coach Raul D. Alcoseba were all set to take home their second straight MVBA championship, controlling the first three periods and leading by as many as 13 points, 64-51, late in the third quarter. Adding to the woes of the wards of MVBA chair Gov. Oscar S. Moreno were a spate of injuries that hit stars Gilbert Demape, Bob Cozy Ilanga and Dondon Mendoza, forcing Coach Rex Salvana to give extended playing time to his role players. That was until disaster struck on the part of M. Lhuillier.

M. Lhuillier's Alano Caputolan pegged the count with a field goal, 75-67. Suddenly, MisOr went on a 19-0 run led by the two triples of Rocky Sanchez plus another six markers from Jun Pardillo thus giving them the lead entering the last two minutes, 86-75.

Mike Manigo ended MisOr's run with a basket at the 1:55 mark.

RP rises to 171 in Fifa rankings

THE PHILIPPINES CONTINUED its rise in world football this month, jumping 13 places in the year-end rankings released by the International Football Federation (Fifa).

From 184 in November, the Filipinos are now ranked 171, after racking up 61 ranking points for their swashbuckling finish in the Asean Football Championship-Qualifiers held in Bacolod City.

The Philippines has moved up 24 places in the past two months.

After losing 1-2 against Laos, the Nationals won three straight matches, including two against previously higher-ranked opponents, allowing them to nail a spot in the Asean Championships scheduled next month in Bangkok and Singapore.

More importantly, the Philippines—at least, until the end of the year—no longer holds the sorry distinction as Southeast Asia's second-worst ranked team, after newcomer Timor Leste.

The Philippines, now ranked seventh in the region, is even one rung higher than powerhouse Vietnam and two ahead of Cambodia. Brunei is second-worst at 174, while Timor Leste remained at 198.

Singapore stayed on top of the region at 111, followed by Thailand at 137.

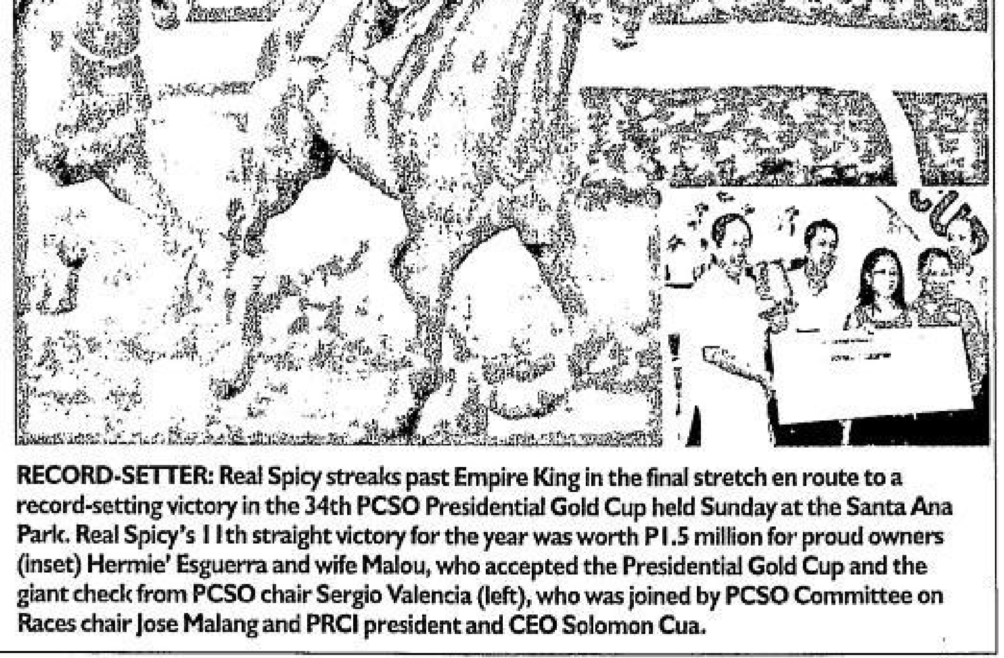
Meanwhile, Laos, the top team in the Asean Qualifiers with four wins, registered 105 points to be at 151, just ahead of Malaysia (152), Indonesia (153) and Myanmar (154).

Philippine Football Federation president Juan Miguel Romualdez expressed delight over the rankings, the country's best since December 2004. Two months earlier the country stood at its worst position at 195.

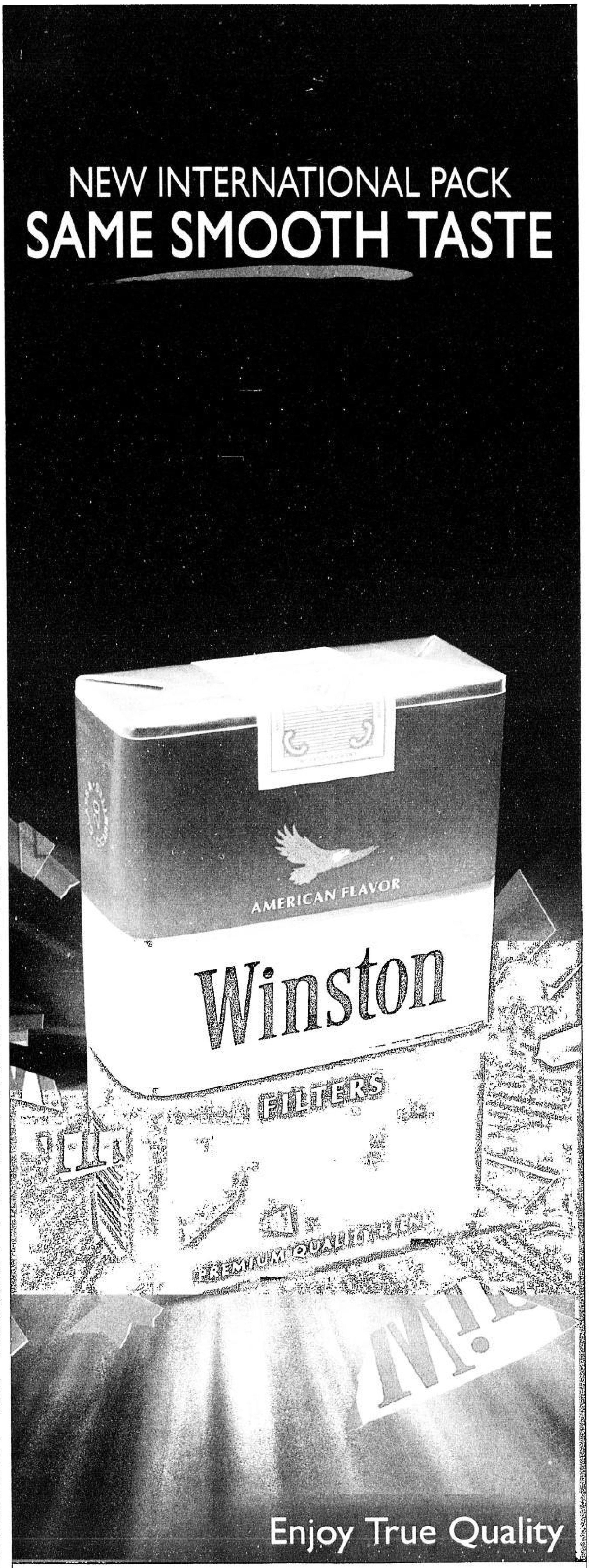
"We are still the underdogs in the next tournament but at least we now have a team that has learned how to win and will be confident when they step into the field," Romualdez told the Inquirer. "Let us not raise our expectations too high because the tournament will be very tough".

The Philippines, which defeated Brunei, Cambodia and Timor Leste to qualify, has been grouped with three-time winner Thailand, Malaysia and Myanmar in the Asean Championships, which stakes $100,000 to the champion squad.

Cedelf P. Tupas, Inquirer Visayas



RECORD-SETTER: Real Spicy streaks past Empire King in the final stretch en route to a record-setting victory in the 34th PCSO Presidential Gold Cup held Sunday at the Santa Ana Park. Real Spicy's 11th straight victory for the year was worth P1.5 million for proud owners (inset) Hermie' Esguerra and wife Malou, who accepted the Presidential Gold Cup and the giant check from PCSO chair Sergio Valencia (left), who was joined by PCSO Committee on Races chair Jose Malang and PRCI president and CEO Solomon Cua.



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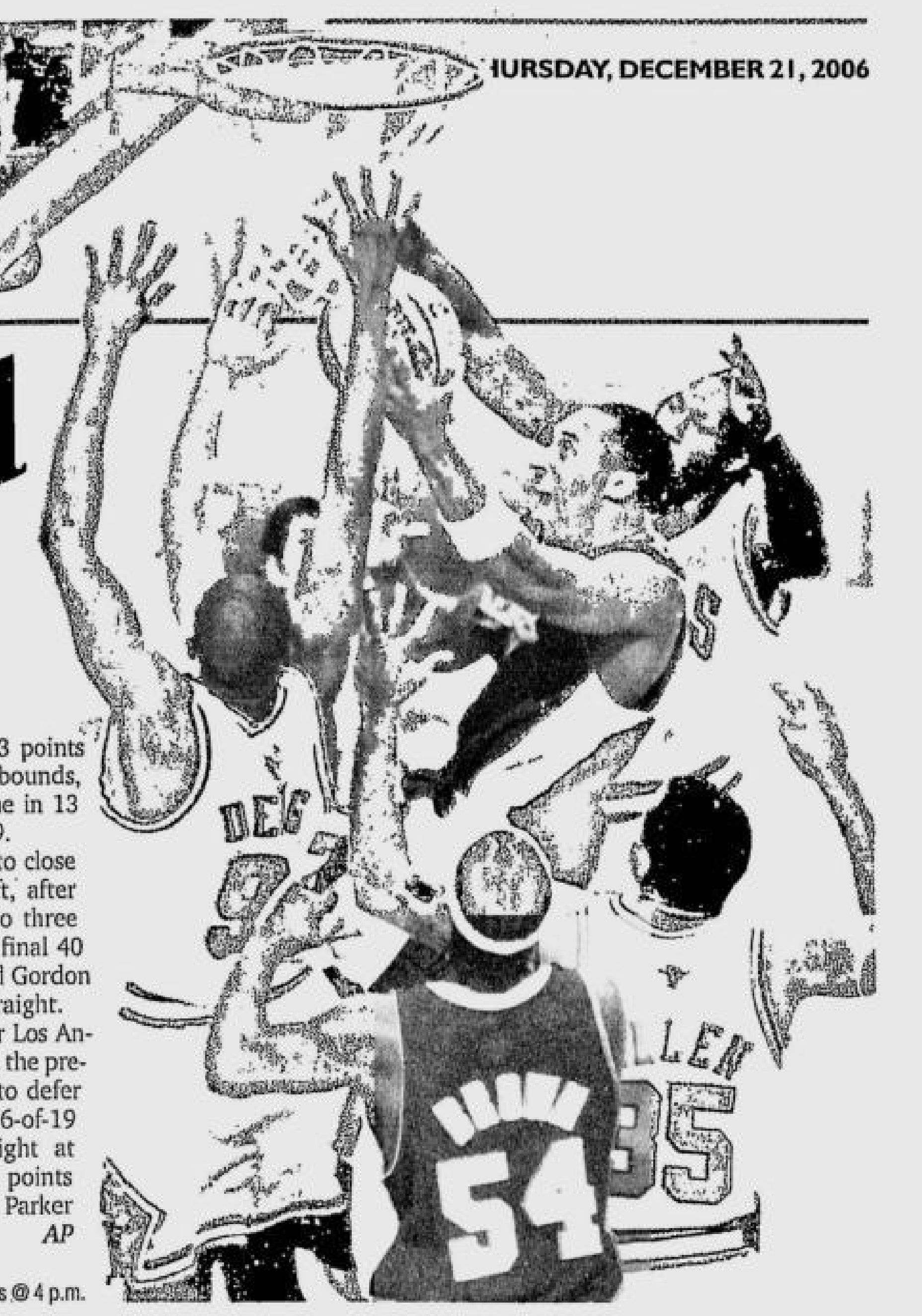
SPORT



KOBE BRYANT finds the lane crowded as he goes for a drive. REUTERS

Suns win club-record 15th straight game

PHOENIX—AMARE STOUDEMIRE dominated with 28 points and 10 rebounds in 28 minutes, and the Phoenix Suns downed the Toronto Raptors, 115-98, to set a franchise-record 15th consecutive victory in the NBA on Tuesday.

The Suns try to extend the NBA's longest winning streak in seven seasons against Denver on Wednesday, with the Nuggets possibly fielding Allen Iverson, whom they acquired in a trade with the Philadelphia 76ers (*see related story below*).

Stoudemire was 11-for-14 from the field and sat out the final 15 minutes in arguably his most impressive outing since he returned after missing all but three games of last season following microfracture knee surgery.

Steve Nash had 10 points and 15 assists in three quarters for Phoenix, which hasn't lost since an overtime setback at Utah on Nov. 18. Six Suns reached double figures on Tuesday. Shawn Marion scored 17, Leandro Barbosa 14, Raja Bell 13 and Boris Diaw 12.

The Suns broke the franchise record of 14 straight set Dec. 1-30, 1992. The 15-game streak is the longest in the NBA since the Los Angeles Lakers won 19 in a row from Feb. 4 to March 13, 2000.

TJ Ford scored 19 for Toronto before leaving in the fourth quarter with a bruised lower back. Top draft pick Andrea Bargnani 18 for the Raptors.

Phoenix led by 27 in the third quarter, when coach Mike D'Antoni began to rest his regular starters and go to his bench.

At Chicago, Luol Deng scored 23 points and tied a season-high with 12 rebounds, and the Bulls won for the 12th time in 13 games, tripping the LA Lakers, 94-89.

Ben Gordon hit two free throws to close out the win with 10.9 seconds left, after Smush Parker cut the Bulls' lead to three with a foul shot and a dunk in the final 40 seconds. Deng hit 9-of-16 shots, and Gordon scored 22 as Chicago won its fifth straight.

Kobe Bryant was a non-factor for Los Angeles after scoring a combined 98 in the previous two games. He was content to defer and finished with 19 points on 6-of-19 shooting. Kwame Brown went right at Chicago's Ben Wallace, scoring 18 points and grabbing 12 rebounds, and Parker scored 16. *AP*

NBA TODAY ON BASKETBALL TV

9 a.m.—Memphis vs San Antonio (replays @ 4 p.m. & 9:30 p.m.

76ers deal Iverson to Denver Nuggets

IVERSON AP

PHILADELPHIA—Allen Iverson was traded by the 76ers to the Denver Nuggets on Tuesday, sending the disgruntled NBA All-Star out of Philadelphia after 10 years.

The four-time scoring champion was given to the Nuggets in exchange for Andre Miller, Joe Smith and two 2007 first-round picks. The Nuggets also get Ivan McFarlin.

The trade comes one day after NBA scoring leader Carmelo Anthony of the Nuggets was suspended for 15 games because of a weekend brawl between the Nuggets and New York Knicks. Iverson now takes his 31.2 scoring average to Denver and ends his turbulent tenure with the franchise that made him the No. 1 selection in the NBA's 1996 draft.

"I'm very happy about the trade," Iverson said in an e-mailed statement. "Denver's style of play fits my strengths. I'm looking forward to playing with Carmelo, the rest of the Denver Nuggets, and for (coach) George Karl, who is a proven winner."

Iverson, a seven-time All-Star, transformed the Sixers from lottery losers to contenders, though he couldn't win an NBA title. He came close in 2001, when the 76ers lost to the Los Angeles Lakers in the NBA finals, but since then the team has fallen from the elite, missing the playoffs twice in the last three seasons. *AP*

Federer improves yet again in 2006

LONDON—FOR ROGER FEDERER to do any better next year, he'll need to win everything.

The world's top-ranked tennis player had another incredible year in 2006, winning three Grand Slams and the season-ending Masters Cup.

The only major title Federer has yet to win—the French Open—is within reach, too. The Swiss star made the final for the first time but lost to defending champion Rafael Nadal.

"To finish (the season) off by winning the Masters Cup, the world championship so to speak, it's the perfect ending to an incredible season," Federer said. "There's not much more I could have done."

Federer has been ranked No. 1 since Feb. 2, 2004, and already has enough points to ensure he'll break Jimmy Connors' record of 160 consecutive weeks atop the ATP rankings by the end of February. Only two players (Nadal and Andy Murray) beat Federer this year.

He finished the season with 12 titles in 16 finals appearances from his 17 tournaments, winning $8.34 million.

Nadal also had a stellar year. Beside winning the French Open for the second consecutive year and losing to Federer in the Wimbledon final, the 20-year-old Spaniard set a record for consecutive wins on clay. The win over Federer in the Paris final was his 60th in a row, dating to April 2005.

The women's game continued to show that all the top players can win, but Amelie Mauresmo finally emerged as a threat to win on all surfaces.

The Frenchwoman, who had reached only one Grand Slam final before 2006, won the Australian Open and Wimbledon, and lost to Justine Henin-Hardenne in the final of the WTA Championships.

"I will look back on my season and say I would have signed for it any time if you told me I was going to get two Grand Slams titles," Mauresmo said.

Henin-Hardenne reached the finals at all four Slams—the first woman to achieve that since Martina Hingis in 1997—but won only her second straight French Open for her fifth major title. She finished No. 1 for a second time. *AP*

College-bound Wie gets into Stanford

THOUSAND OAKS, CALIFORNIA—MICHELLE Wie has been accepted into Stanford University and is planning on entering the school Tiger Woods attended.

The 17-year-old said on Tuesday she would enroll in the college next year, dispelling any talk she would concentrate exclusively on her professional golf career once she finished high school in Hawaii.

"No one really believed me," Wie said from Orlando, Florida, where she is working with swing coach David Leadbetter. "Now that I got into Stanford, it was one of my dreams, and I want to go through with it. I definitely want to go there and really try to graduate."

Wie has been mixing school and golf since she played three LPGA Tour events at age 12. She turned professional in October 2005 and earned close to $20 million this year from endorsements, earnings and appearance money overseas.

Wie will not be eligible to play US college golf.

Told that Tiger Woods lasted only two years at Stanford before he turned pro, she said, "Hopefully, I'll last a little longer."

Wie has been one of the top headliners in women's golf she since she became the youngest US Golf Association champion at adult events by winning the US Women's Amateur Public Links in 2003 at 13. *AP*

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ABC 5	Nickelodeon				TNA Wrestling		Metro		Big News	S.O.S		Hayop Na Hayop		Wow Mali-ng-Mali Byles	Sentro	The Best Of Dokyu		Araw-Araw Premyo Sa Rasbo	Simbang Gabi
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Cinema One		Bilanglo Ang Bitui Sa Langit				Muling Umawit Ang Puso				Sanib				Once Upon A Time				Blackboard	
Cinemax			The 7th Voyage Of Sinbad				Komodo Vs. Cobra (5:20 PM)			Run, Ronnie Run				Dawn Of The Dead				Murphy's Law	
CNN		Business International		World News	World Sport	Larry King Live		Business International	World Sport	World News Asia		World News	World Sport	World News Asia	News Asia [illegible] Global Challenges	Your World Today			
Crime/Suspense		Revelations		Law and Order: Special Victims Unit + 24		Profiler		Investigative Reports		Law and Order		Law and Order: Special Victims Unit + 24		Bones		Threshold		E-Ring	
Discovery Channel		Psychic Witness		Man Made Marvels		More Than Human		Deadliest Catch		Extreme Machines		One Step Beyond	Connect	Mythbusters		Man Made Marvels		Power Zone	
Disney Channel	Mr. Bean: The Animated Series	Totally Spies	Art Attack/Un-talkative Bunny	Shuriken School	Lilo & Stitch	Martin Mystery	Totally Spies	Kim Possible	Mr. Bean: The Animated Series	That's So Raven	Wonderful World Of Disney			Monster Allergy	Shuriken School	Buzz On Maggie	Totally Spies	Wonderful World Of Disney	
ESPN		ESPN Great Outdoor Games				Watersports Programming Hot Water		English Premier Football League				Women's Golf League Cup '06 Highlights		Sportscenter Asia	World Pool League '05 Poland		World Pool League '05 Poland		Sportscenter Asia
ETC		Beach Girls		Change of Heart	Elimidate	Blind Date	Fifth Wheel	Seinfeld	Ambush Makeover	The Tyra Banks Show		Will & Grace	Friends	Simple Life 4	Rated Ohl 6	Entertainment Tonight	The Insider	The Tonight Show With Jay Leno	
ETC 2nd Avenue		Starting Over		The Maury Povich Show		The Jerry Springer Show		Dr. Phil		NBC Nightly News	The Inside Edition	The Ellen (Degeneres) Show		Wheel Of Fortune	Jeopardy	Nanny 911		NBC Nightly News	The Inside Edition
Fox News		Hannity & Colmes		On The Record With Greta Van Susteren		The O'Reilly Factor		Your World With Neil Cavuto		Fox & Friends						Fox News Live			
GMA 7	Makita Ka Lang Muli	Kapuso Movie Festival				Ghost Fighter	Jewel In The Palace		24 Oras	Captain Barbell	Atlantika	StarStruck: The Next Level	Bakekang	A Rosy Life (9:15 PM)		Magpakailanman		Saksi	100% Pinoy
Hallmark Channel				Judging Amy		Just Cause		McLeod's Daughters		Strong Medicine		Family Law		Spooks		Wire In The Blood		Regenesis	
HBO		Fresh Horses			The Witches Of Eastwick (4:45 PM)				HBO What's New In 2007 (6:45 PM)	Superman II				Anchorman: The Legend Of Ron Burgundy				The Postman	
Hero TV	Megaman	Sunny Pig	Inuyasha III	Mirmo de Pon	Saiyuki Reload	Naruto	Monkey Turn	Gundam Seed Destiny	Full Metal Panic	Galaxy Angels	Voltes V Evolution	Inuyasha III	Mirmo de Pon	Astroboy	Three-Eyed One	Naruto	AmDriver	Megaman	Yu-Gi-Oh GX
IBC 13		EZ Shop				Home Shopping Network	IBC Express Balita	Pangarap Kong Jackpot		EBC Earth Files		Japan Video Topics/ Arms		Travel Philippines	Japan Video Topics/ Arms	EBC Earth Files	IBC News Tonite	Matrobali Show	
JackTV		Smackdown				X-Men	The Batman	Experience		Mad TV		Just For Laughs	Scare Tactics	Distraction	Banzai	The Daily Show With Jon Stewart	Premium Blend	The Late Show David Letterman	
Lifestyle Network	Get Color	Wolfgang Puck	Inside Dish	Rachel Ray		Sensible Chic	At Home With	Barefoot Contessa	Everyday Italian	Martha		Look For Less	Good Finds	Rachel Ray		E! True Hollywood Story		Your Private Island	Genuine Article
MTV Philippines		Handpicked Kwan	VH1 All Access Awesomely Badder Fashion		Punk'd	The Hills	MTV Hits			Get Spotted	Ultrasound Kwan	TRL		Punk'd	The Hills	Bamo 19	Sessions Kwan	VH1 All Access Awesomely Bad Freakouts	
MYX		Rock MYX	My MYX	Mellow MYX	Urban MYX	Take 5	MYX News	MYX Firsts	Star MYX	OPM MYX	Pop MYX	MYX Daily Top Ten		MYX Presents		MYX Bandarito	My MYX	MYX Backtrax	MYXlog
National Geographic		Nat'l Geographic Specials		Naked Science		Hollywood Science		Top 5		Nat'l Geographic Specials		WOW*		Megastructures		Naked Science		Hollywood Science	
NBN					Diyos Ko, Mahal Mo Ba Siya?	Teledyaryo W/ Ria Tanyag & Angelique Lazo		Tinig Ng Bayan		Equilibrium		Teledyaryo Final Edition		World Pool Championship					
Net 25	INC Chronicles (Filipino)	In Focus	Euromaxx	INC Chronicles (English)	INC Chronicles (Filipino)	Ang Tamang Daan		News Beat (Live)		OpenLine Live	Gabay Sa Kalusugan	INC Chronicles (English)	INC Chronicles (Filipino)	Ang Pagbubuyag		World Report	In Focus	DWTV Journal News	Euromaxx
Nickelodeon	Chalkzone	The Fairly Odd Parents	SpongeBob SquarePants	Naturally Sadie	Romeo	SpongeBob SquarePants	My Life As A Teenage Robot	Danny Phantom	The Adventures Jimmy Neutron	The Fairly Odd Parents	Drake & Josh	Unfabulous	Dark Oracle	The Fairly Odd Parents	All That	Romeo	As Told By Ginger	My Dad The Rock Star	
PBO			Tumbasan Mo Ng Buhay				Hadlan Mo Akong Mul				Kahit Butas ng Karayom Papasukin Ko				'Pre Hanggang Sa Huli				Bedtime Stories
Qtv	Pawnshop No. 8	Samurai X	Hikaru No Go	The Prince Of Tennis	MMS (My Music Station)		Moms		Winter Sonata	Irene	Emperor Of The Sea	Takeshi's Castle	Family Zoo		News On Q	Women's Desk		Irene	Value Added Treasures
RPN 9	TV Shopping	Dee's Day		Roundtable Discussion	Mr. Fighting	RPN Aksyon Balita		Complete Savages	Jake In Progress	The 4400		Medium		Cold Case		Newswatch Now	P-Max	Kasangga Mo Ang Langit	Police Hour
SBN 21								Sony Music Video				Oras Ng Himala		Oras ng Katotohanan		Friends Again		Sony Music Video	
Solar Sports						Gillette World Sport	Rookie Manual	Billiards: US 9 Ball		WPT Tour				Hoop Nation		Sportsdesk		Autofocus	
Star Movies				Marked For Death (3:55 PM)			Maid Of Honor (5:25 PM)			Ladder 49				Because Of Winn-Dixie				Just Friends (10:50PM)	
Star World		The Bold & The Beautiful		General Hospital		Desire Table For Three		The Simpsons	Malcolm In The Middle	Star News Asia	Seinfeld	Hope & Faith	According To Jim	The Office	Two And A Half Men	The Drew Carey Show		Seinfeld	Hope & Faith
Studio 23								Blog	Pinoy Dream Academy	Wazzup Wazzup	Totally Outrageous	Two And A Half Men	Will & Grace	Grey's Anatomy		News Central	Oprah (10:45PM)		MYXlog
UniTV				KNC Show	Kakampi Mo Ang Batas		Kaka at Claire Kaagapay Nyo		Public Hearing	Make My Day		Ang Dating Daan (8:15 PM)							

TV SCHEDULES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE.

IN THIS ISSUE
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■ **BIR says 2006 target** unrealistic, wants it cut to P601.4B /B5

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BUSINESS

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Neda says economy to grow 5.7% in 2007

Downplays concerns on US economic slowdown

By Michelle V. Remo

THE NATIONAL ECONOMIC AND DEVELOPMENT Authority has downplayed concerns that the expected slowdown of the US economy next year would dampen exports and overall growth of the Philippine economy.

In its yearend briefing yesterday, the Neda stressed that the Philippines' export markets were already well diversified and a slack in demand by American consumers would not significantly hurt Philippine export earnings.

"It is not correct to say that we are highly dependent on the United States. Our exports already have many growth drivers," said Dennis Arroyo, Neda director for policy and planning.

The Neda has projected that exports would sustain in 2007 the double-digit growth seen this year, forecasting a 10.5-percent rise year-on-year.

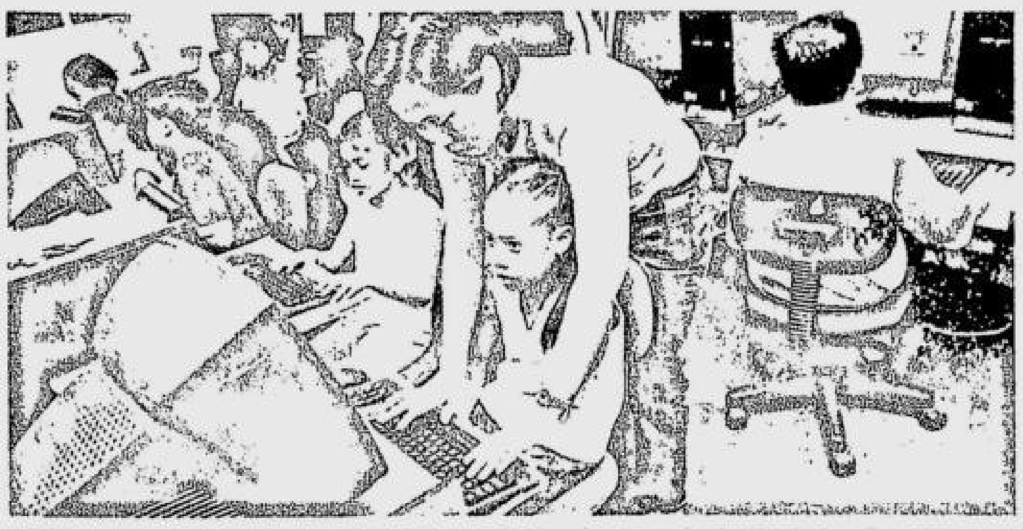
As of the first 10 months of this year, exports grew 16.4 percent to $39.32 billion from a year ago, much better than the 10-percent full-year growth target. The growth was largely attributed to the huge global demand for electronics.

Arroyo said exports would be one of the growth drivers for the Philippines next year. The Neda is sticking to its target that the economy would grow by at least 5.7 percent next year.

The official also said the Neda was keeping its 2006 projection of an economic growth of at least 5.5 percent. In the first three quarters of the year, the economy grew 5.4 percent year-on-year.

Arroyo noted that gone were the days when the United States accounted for bulk of the Philippines' export earnings. While the United States is still the Philippines' biggest export market, its contribution to the total export

NEDA/ B2



BUSINESS leaders have warned that the continuing downward spiral in the quality of education will peak in 5 to 6 years, while the Department of Education wants to address the problem early on, or at the pre-school and nursery levels. PDI PHOTO

Education crisis seen to peak in 5 years

By Daxim L. Lucas

THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE ONGOING "crisis" in the local education system will be felt fully in five to six years with the business community having to shoulder the brunt of the costs.

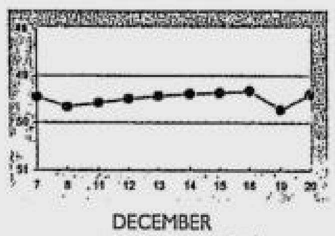
This was the warning aired by the Philippine Business for Education (PBEd) advocacy group, which the other day unveiled its five-point priority agenda to arrest the "downward spiral" in the quality of education in the country.

Among other things, the group wants to "adopt global standards" by lengthening the basic education cycle from the present 10

EDUCATION/ B5

INDICATORS

CURRENCIES

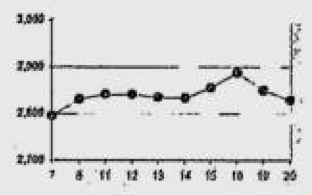


₱ 49.375 = $ 1

As of 5 p.m., Dec. 20, 2006

STOCK MARKET

PSE COMPOSITE INDEX



(See stock market report on Page B2)

Shares close lower

SHARE PRICES CLOSED 0.71-PERCENT lower yesterday on consolidation ahead of the Christmas holidays, with investors keeping to the sidelines despite a regional rebound, dealers said.

Thailand's surprise move imposing foreign currency controls still kept investors

SHARES/ B2

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Listed firms' net income up 32.5%

Combined profit hit P167.9B as of September

By Elizabeth L. Sanchez

PHILIPPINE STOCK EXCHANGE
PSE INDEX

PSE SAYS listed firms performing well on back of growing economy PDI PHOTO

THE COMBINED INCOME OF companies listed on the Philippine Stock Exchange (PSE) surged 32.5 percent to P167.915 billion in the first nine months of 2006 from P126.73 billion last year, the PSE said in a statement yesterday.

PSE president Francis Lim said that the growth in nine-month earnings exceeded the 27.35-percent hike in net income recorded by the listed firms during the first half of the year.

The new study was based on the unaudited financial statements of 233 listed domestic companies that submitted the reports to the PSE as of Dec. 14, 2006.

"The faster increase in the combined income of the listed companies reaffirms perceptions that the economy stands on solid ground, despite the challenging political environment here and abroad," Lim said.

"This goes to show that despite what's happening to our Asian neighbors, our listed firms are doing very well with the government's efforts to rein in the budget deficit and keep interest rates low," Lim also said.

Local stock prices on Tuesday shed 28 points and another 20.14 points yesterday to 2,829.57.

In Thailand, stock prices fell 108 points after the Bank of Thailand imposed a new rule that discouraged foreign investors from bringing to Thailand short-term foreign exchange capital funds to arrest the surge in the Thai baht.

Thailand later dropped the plan.

Lim observed, however, that for the same period from January to September this year, stock prices—as tracked by the Philippine Stock Exchange index (PSEi)—advanced 22 percent to 2,556.71 points from 2,096.04 at the close of 2005.

The combined gross revenues of the listed companies from January to September went up 12.76 percent to P1.5 trillion from P1.33 trillion a year earlier.

All six industry groups on the main board, as well as the small- and medium-sized enterprises (SME) board, enjoyed higher net income and gross revenues this year.

"All six sectors recorded a double-digit growth in income and revenues, while those on the SME board enjoyed a 572-percent hike in combined income," Lim said.

Firms on the SME board chalked up the best growth in net profit after reversing the P1.28 million in losses they incurred for the first nine months of last year, by replacing this with a P6-million net income for the same period this year.

The total gross revenues of firms on the SME board went up 66 percent to P122.13 million.

Outside the SME Board, the mining and oil sector recorded the highest growth in income at 81.4 percent as combined net earnings of companies in this sector reached P3.59 billion from P1.98 billion a year ago.

Listed companies in the services sector accounted for the biggest share of the income pie as their combined net profit for the first nine months of the year hit P47.74 billion, or 23.2 percent higher than the year-ago level of P38.74 billion.

The services sector also accounted for the biggest share of gross revenues at P218.5 billion, or 5.5 percent higher than the year-ago level of P207.01 billion.

Net earnings of firms in the holding firms sector went up by 56 percent to P39.7 billion; those in the industrial sector rose by 28.6 percent to P34.9 billion; the financial sector by 28.5 percent to P29.89 billion; and property sector by 19 percent to P12.11 billion.

The combined earnings of companies that make up the 30-company PSEi went up 25.4 percent to P116.53 billion from P92.89 billion the previous year. But the share of the PSEi firms to the total income of all listed companies shrank to 69.4 percent from 73.3 percent.

Nonoc mine talks hit snag over ownership

PLANS TO REOPEN THE NONOC NICKEL mine in the Philippines by 2008 might be delayed as talks between Chinese investors and the mine owner are deadlocked over sharing ownership, a senior government official said on Wednesday.

Jinchuan, which operates China's largest nickel mine, and the Baosteel Group, China's biggest steel firm, agreed in April 2005 to invest at least $1 billion to revive the Nonoc mine, which has the capacity to produce 41,000 tons of nickel a year.

But since then, there has been little progress in talks with the mine's owner, Philnico Industrial Corp.

"There is a big divergence in their bargaining position," Economic Planning Secretary Romulo Neri said in a briefing.

"Debt settlement is one of the more problematic (issues), but the government is willing to bend over backwards just to get them to agree, but Philnico is asking for more and more concessions, more payment," he added.

The government wants to re-open the Nonoc nickel mine as part of plans to revive the country's once lucrative minerals sector, which would boost economic growth and improve state finances.

In July, Jinchuan said it had signed a debt accord with the Philippine government and Nonoc mine owner Philnico.

Philnico has sought to settle some $300 million of debts stemming from the mid-1990s when the company bought Nonoc Mining from the government.

Evaristo Narvaez, chairman of Philnico, told Reuters the government was trying to mediate so that both parties reconcile their differences.

"The issue is not valuation. After four years of doing due diligence work, they (Jinchuan) said they wanted to do a feasibility study that will be completed in May 2007," Narvaez said.

Shell IPO plans hang

By Abigail L. Ho

PILIPINAS SHELL PETROLEUM CORP.'S decision to list on the Philippine Stock Exchange will hinge on the final results of its study on whether to keep its refinery here.

"The company's (initial public offering) is linked with our refinery expansion study. If we do stay, we'll have to comply with the law," Shell country chair Edgar Chua said yesterday.

Section 22 of RA 8479, or the Downstream Oil Industry Deregulation Act, mandates oil refiners to list at least 10 percent of their common stock at the local bourse within three years of the effectivity of the law.

This timeframe had been pushed back due to the bearish market in the past few years.

But PSE president Francis Lim said in an earlier briefing that this argument no longer holds true, judging from the local bourse's performance in recent months.

Shell is expected to come up with a final decision within the first quarter of 2007.

In an earlier interview, Energy Secretary Raphael Lotilla said officials from Shell parent firm Royal Dutch Shell Plc indicated that the local incentive environment would be a big factor in its decision to remain a refiner or just be a pure importer.

ALI to develop Dela Rosa lot

AYALA LAND INC. has signed an agreement with two partners to jointly develop a more than 40,000-square-meter lot on Dela Rosa Street in Makati into an office building for the fast-growing business process outsourcing (BPO) sector.

Sources said this was the largest BPO building that ALI would undertake in terms of leasable space.

ALI's partners in the project are MLT Investments Ltd. and Filipinas Investments Ltd.

ALI, MLT and Filipinas Investments are in the process of incorporating a joint-venture company, which will develop the BPO building.

The joint-venture company will be 36 percent owned by ALI, with the balance of 64 percent split evenly between MLT and Filipinas Investments.

MLT Investments Ltd. is an investment arm of Goldman Sachs, a leading global investment banking, securities and investment management firm that provides a wide range of services worldwide to a substantial and diversified client base,

Clients include corporations, financial institutions, governments and high net worth individuals.

On the other hand, Filipinas Investments Ltd. is an affiliate of Capmark Asia, the Asian operations of Capmark Financial Group Inc., which is headquartered in Horsham, Pennsylvania, USA. *Elizabeth L. Sanchez*

Neda says economy to grow 5.7% in 2007

From page B1

earnings had dwindled over the years.

As of the first nine months of this year, the United States accounted for 18.3 percent of the Philippines' export earnings. Japan followed with 16.9 percent. Main Asean countries—Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Singapore—together accounted for another 16.9 percent of the Philippines' export earnings, while the European Union had an 18.4-percent share.

Arroyo likewise refuted projections by some analysts that global demand for electronics, the Philippines' major export product, would subside next year.

The Neda official noted a forecast by California-based Semiconductor Industry Association (SIA) that global demand for consumer electronics like iPODS, MP3 players and the like would continue to increase. While the US economy might be headed for a slowdown, demand from other markets like Japan, China and other Asian countries was seen to rise.

Aside from exports, other growth drivers for the Philippine economy next year, according to the Neda, were higher dollar inflows from remittances of overseas Filipino workers, higher investments in real estate, continued growth of the call center industry, and higher government spending for infrastructure.

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Shares close lower

From page B1

wary even if the measure was quickly rescinded after a sharp plunge on the Thai stock market, they said.

The composite index fell 20.14 points to 2,829.57 after trading between 2,824.21 and 2,854.97.

Gainers narrowly beat losers 53 to 51 with 46 stocks unchanged.

Turnover was 2.6 billion shares worth P2.5 billion.

"The market is still consolidating, mainly because of the holidays ahead, while both local and foreign investors used the Thai debacle as an excuse to take further profits," said Rommel Macapagal of Westlink Global Equities Inc.

"Also, despite assurances by the (Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas) that it would keep a liberal stance on foreign capital inflows and this was not a cause for concern, investors chose to shy away from the market," Macapagal added.

The BSP said it was not planning to follow the Bank of Thailand's move to impose controls on capital inflows and would continue to maintain a liberal stance on foreign capital.

Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. fell P50 to P2,340 after saying it would halt the trading of some of its shares in New York.

Ayala Corp. retreated P5 to P495.

Power distributor Manila Electric Co.'s A-shares, restricted to Filipinos, declined 50 centavos to P54 while its B-shares, open to foreign investors, dropped a peso to P54.

Food and beverage giant San Miguel Corp.'s A-shares rose 50 centavos to P67 while its B-shares edged up P1.50 to P73.50. *AFP*

PHILIPPINE STOCK EXCHANGE

(As of December 20, 2006)

STOCKS	OPEN	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE	VOLUME
		FINANCIAL			
		BANKS			
Asiatrust Dev. Bank Inc.	7.3	7.3	7.3	7.3	1,000
Banco de Oro Univ. Bank	45.5	46	45	46	639,600
Bank of the Phil. Islands	63	63	62	62	1,590,000
China Banking Corp.	695	700	690	700	20,660
Citystate Savings Bank	19	19	19	19	300
Export and Ind. Bank A	0.49	0.49	0.47	0.47	2,120,000
Equitable PCI Bank Inc.	80.5	82	80.5	81.5	131,500
Metropolitan Bank & Trust	51.5	51.5	49.5	50	3,256,100
Philippine National Bank	43	43	42.5	43	17,600
Phil. Savings Bank	47	48	47	48	2,400
Rizal Comm. Banking Corp.	25	25	25	25	173,400
Security Bank Corp.	66	66	65.5	65.5	64,200
Union Bank of the Phil.	49.5	49.5	49.5	49.5	16,700
		OTHER FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS			
Citiseconline.Com Inc.	5.3	5.4	5.3	5.4	47,000
First Metro Invest. Corp.	30	30.5	30	30.5	4,000
Manulife Financial Corp.	1645	1645	1645	1645	1,340
PCI Leasing & Fin. Inc.	1.38	1.38	1.38	1.38	60,000
Phil. Stock Exchange Inc.	272.5	272.5	272.5	272.5	1,000
Sun Life Financial Inc.	2070	2070	2070	2070	300
Ivantage Corp.	1.52	1.52	1.5	1.52	815,000
		INDUSTRIAL			
		ELECTRICITY, ENERGY, POWER & WATER			
PNOC Energy Dev. Corp.	4.45	4.65	4.45	4.55	75,698,000
First Gen Corp.	52.5	53.5	52.5	53.5	535,800
First Phil Hldgs Corp.	61	61.5	60.5	61.5	520,900
Manila Electric Co. A	55	55	54	54	101,400
Manila Electric Co. B	55	55.5	54	54	6,196,100
Manila Water Co. Inc.	9.9	9.9	9.5	9.5	5,030,000
Petron Corp.	4.05	4.1	4	4.05	2,865,000
Trans-Asia Oil and Energy	1.14	1.14	1.1	1.1	826,000
		FOOD, BEVERAGE & TOBACCO			
Cadp Group Corp.	2	2	2	2	55,000
Ginebra San Miguel Inc.	21	21	21	21	15,000
Jollibee Foods Corp.	41	41	40.5	40.5	389,300
RFM Corp.	1	1	1	1	107,000
Roxas Holdings Inc.	2.46	2.48	2.46	2.48	220,000
San Miguel Corp. A	66.5	67	66	67	268,900
San Miguel Corp. B	72.5	73.5	72	73.5	418,900
Alliance Tuna Int'l. Inc.	2.16	2.16	2.08	2.08	172,000
Universal Robina Corp.	19	19	18.5	19	1,978,400
		CONSTRUCTION, INFRASTRUCTURE & ALLIED SERVICES			
Southeast Asian Cement	1.06	1.08	1.02	1.06	12,974,000
Engineering Equip. Inc.	3.3	3.3	3.1	3.1	1,781,000
Fortune Cement Corp.	2.55	2.55	2.55	2.55	8,000
Holcim Philippines Inc.	7.5	7.6	7.4	7.5	5,285,000
Phil Nat'l Const. Corp.	6	6	5.8	5.8	12,000
Republic Cement Corp.	3.9	3.9	3.9	3.9	148,000
CHEMICALS					
Chemrez Technologies Inc.	5.2	5.4	5.1	5.4	4,381,000
Mabuhay Vinyl Corp.	0.62	0.63	0.62	0.63	100,000
		DIVERSIFIED INDUSTRIALS			
Geograce Res. Phil. Inc.	0.7	0.72	0.7	0.71	9,490,000
Picop Resources Inc.	0.23	0.245	0.22	0.23	33,920,000
Panasonic Mfg Phil Corp.	6.8	6.8	6.8	6.8	13,000
		HOLDING FIRMS			
Atok-Big Wedge Co. Inc.	6.5	6.5	6.5	6.5	1,000
Abacus Con Res & Hdg A	0.0085	0.0085	0.0085	0.0085	49,000,000
Ayala Corp.	500	500	495	495	454,250
Alsons Cons. Res. Inc.	0.62	0.62	0.62	0.62	150,000
Aboitiz Equity Ventures	6.8	6.8	6.7	6.8	575,000
Ajo.Net Holdings Inc.	0.06	0.0625	0.06	0.0625	15,900,000
A. Soriano Corp.	2.85	2.85	2.85	2.85	19,000
APC Group Inc.	0.39	0.39	0.37	0.39	10,330,000
Alcorn Gold Res. Corp.	0.01	0.011	0.01	0.011	802,000,000
Anglo Phil Holdings Corp.	1.08	1.1	1.04	1.08	3,936,000
ATN Holdings Inc.	1.96	1.96	1.88	1.88	54,000
Baguio Gold Holdings Corp.	3.2	4	3.2	3.6	1,379,000
Balabac Resources & Hldgs	1.14	1.3	1.14	1.16	203,000
Benpres Holdings Corp.	2.24	2.24	2.2	2.2	3,637,000
DMCI Holdings Inc.	6.2	6.2	6	6	3,189,000
Filinvest Dev. Corp.	3.65	3.65	3.55	3.55	900,000
House of Investments Inc.	1.9	1.9	1.9	1.9	14,000
J.G. Summit Holdings Inc.	9.7	10	9.7	10	2,563,000
Medco Holdings	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25	100,000
Magnum Holdings Inc.	4.1	4.1	3.85	4	128,000
Multitech Inv. Corp	1.6	1.6	1.5	1.54	1,278,000
Pacifica	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02	6,000,000
Solid Group Inc.	0.66	0.66	0.66	0.66	100,000
Sinophil Corp.	0.16	0.16	0.155	0.155	2,750,000
SM Investments Corp.	305	305	300	305	95,840
South China Resources Inc.	1.02	1.02	1.02	1.02	220,000
Unioil Res. & Holdings Co	0.3	0.33	0.3	0.33	55,040,000
Wellex Industries Inc	0.13	0.13	0.125	0.13	660,000
		PROPERTY			
Ayala Land Inc.	15.25	15.25	15	15.25	10,581,400
Belle Corp.	1.08	1.14	1.06	1.14	63,548,000
A Brown Co. Inc.	1.68	1.7	1.66	1.66	16,328,000
Crown Equities Inc.	0.41	0.42	0.41	0.41	1,610,000
Cebu Holdings Inc.	3.2	3.2	3.15	3.2	161,000
C&P Homes Inc.	1.42	1.42	1.4	1.4	450,000
Cyber Bay Corp.	0.32	0.32	0.32	0.32	1,200,000
EIB Realty Developers Inc.	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	10,000
Empire East Land Inc.	0.54	0.54	0.53	0.54	8,250,000
Filinvest Land Inc.	1.96	2	1.94	1.96	10,991,000
Highlands Prime Inc.	2.44	2.8	2.44	2.8	130,000
Interport Res.	0.009	0.009	0.0085	0.0085	43,000,000
Interport Res. B	0.0085	0.0085	0.0085	0.0085	30,000,000
Keppel Phils. Prop. Inc.	1.3	1.3	1.28	1.28	100,000
Kuok Phil. Properties	0.48	0.48	0.46	0.48	3,590,000
Fil-Estate Land Inc.	0.67	0.67	0.65	0.65	730,000
Megaworld Corp.	2.28	2.3	2.26	2.3	15,995,000
Metro Pacific Inv. Corp.	3.35	3.35	3.35	3.35	26,000
MRC Allied Ind. Inc.	0.37	0.4	0.37	0.38	1,090,000
Robinsons Land Corp.	15.5	15.5	15.25	15.5	165,600
Phil Realty and Holdings	0.66	0.68	0.65	0.67	14,350,000
SM Development Corp.	2.46	2.55	2.46	2.55	508,000
SM Prime Holdings Inc.	10	10.25	10	10	2,637,000
Suntrust Home Dev. Inc	0.59	0.59	0.59	0.59	100,000
Uniwide Holdings Inc.	0.105	0.115	0.105	0.115	3,400,000
		MEDIA			
ABS-CBN Broadcasting Corp.	20.75	21	20.75	21	19,800
		TELECOMMUNICATIONS			
Digital Telecom Phils Inc.	1.92	1.94	1.88	1.9	5,453,000
Globe Telecom Inc.	1230	1230	1215	1225	21,030
Pilipino Tel. Corp.	6.4	6.5	6.3	6.4	3,708,000
Phil. Long Dis Tel Co.	2385	2390	2340	2340	90,360
		INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY			
Boulevard Holdings Inc.	0.18	0.19	0.18	0.185	7,430,000
Imperial Res.	0.019	0.019	0.019	0.019	11,100,000
Ionics Inc.	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.1	95,000
IPVG Corp.	4.3	4.3	4.2	4.2	546,000
ISM Communications Corp.	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.06	100,000
Music Semiconductors Corp.	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.2	130,000
Transpacific Broadband	4.5	4.75	4.5	4.65	392,000
Philweb Corp.	0.031	0.031	0.031	0.031	96,100,000
		TRANSPORTATION SERVICES			
Aboitiz Trans. Sys. Corp.	1.3	1.3	1.3	1.3	830,000
Int'l Container Term'l Sv	19	19.25	19	19.25	1,033,900
Keppel Phils. Marine Inc.	0.94	0.94	0.94	0.94	110,000
Lorenzo Shipping Corp.	1.3	1.3	1.26	1.28	230,000
		HOTEL & LEISURE			
Leisure & Resorts Corp.	2.14	2.14	2.06	2.08	2,980,000
Premiere Ent. Prod. Inc.	0.35	0.35	0.33	0.35	1,320,000
Waterfront Phils. Inc.	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.6	20,000
		EDUCATION			
Centro Escolar University	9.2	9.2	9.2	9.2	1,520,000
Ipeople Inc	3.05	3.05	3.05	3.05	160,000
		DIVERSIFIED SERVICES			
Macroasia Corp.	2.12	2.2	2.08	2.12	1,918,000
Paxys Inc.	18.5	18.5	18.5	18.5	48,100
		MINING & OIL			
		MINING			
Apex Mining Co. Inc. A	5.7	5.8	5.7	5.7	756,000
Apex Mining Co. Inc. B	5.7	5.9	5.7	5.9	294,000
Abra Mining & Industrial	0.012	0.012	0.011	0.012	74,500,000
Atlas Cons. Min & Dev't	9.6	9.7	9.2	9.5	4,318,000
Benguet Corp. A	9.3	9.5	9.3	9.3	76,000
Benguet Corp. B	25	25	24.75	24.75	20,000
Dizon Copper Silver Mines	2.1	2.1	2.1	2.1	106,000
Lepanto Cons Mng. Co. A	0.26	0.27	0.26	0.26	7,320,000
Lepanto Cons. Mng. Co B	0.27	0.28	0.27	0.28	7,160,000
Manila Mining Corp. A	0.022	0.022	0.022	0.022	90,700,000
Manila Mining Corp. B	0.025	0.025	0.025	0.025	65,000,000
Omico Corp.	0.012	0.013	0.012	0.013	780,600,000
Philex Mining Corp.	4.1	4.15	4.1	4.15	3,285,000
Semirara Mining Corp.	18.75	19	18.75	19	67,000
United Paragon Mining Co.	0.76	0.8	0.76	0.77	1,300,000
Vulcan Ind'l	1.62	1.7	1.6	1.68	12,271,000
		OIL			
Basic Petroleum Corp.	0.29	0.3	0.29	0.3	1,720,000
Oriental Pet. & Min. A	0.011	0.011	0.011	0.011	115,200,000
Oriental Pet. & Min. B	0.011	0.011	0.011	0.011	8,000,000
The Philodrill Corp. A	0.99	1.02	0.99	1	340,000
The Philodrill Corp. B	1.02	1.02	1	1.02	2,010,000
Pnoc Exploration Corp.-B	19	19	19	19	1,000
Petroenergy Res. Corp.	10.25	10.25	9.9	9.9	327,000

CURRENCIES

December 20, 2006 Country	Unit	Euro Equivalent	Dollar Equivalent	Peso Equivalent
United States	Dollar	0.758035	1.000000	49.5660
Japan	Yen	0.006417	0.008465	0.4196
United Kingdom	Pound	1.492571	1.969000	97.5955
Hong Kong	Dollar	0.097483	0.128599	6.3741
Switzerland	Franc	0.624309	0.823588	40.8220
Canada	Dollar	0.657959	0.867980	43.0223
Singapore	Dollar	0.491911	0.648929	32.1648
Australia	Dollar	0.593560	0.783024	38.8114
Bahrain	Dinar*	2.010810	2.652661	131.4818
Saudi Arabia	Rial	0.202283	0.266852	13.2268
Brunei	Dollar	0.490321	0.646831	32.0608
Indonesia	Rupiah	0.000083	0.000109	0.0054
Thailand	Baht	0.021145	0.027894	1.3826
UAE	Dirham	0.206443	0.272339	13.4988
Euro	Euro	1.000000	1.319200	65.3875
Korea	Won	0.000813	0.001073	0.0532
China	Yuan**	0.096921	0.127858	6.3374
Argentina	Peso	0.248129	0.327332	16.2245
Brazil	Real	0.351920	0.464253	23.0112
Denmark	Kroner	0.134220	0.177063	8.7763
India	Rupee	0.016981	0.022401	1.1103
Malaysia	Ringgit	0.212109	0.279814	13.8693
Mexico	New Peso	0.069955	0.092285	4.5742
New Zealand	Dollar	0.525756	0.693577	34.3778
Norway	Kroner	0.122617	0.161757	8.0176
Pakistan	Rupee	0.012441	0.016412	0.8135
South Africa	Rand	0.108244	0.142796	7.0778
Sweden	Kroner	0.111002	0.146434	7.2581
Syria	Pound	0.014603	0.019264	0.9548
Taiwan	Nt Dollar	0.023153	0.030544	1.5139
Venezuela	Bolivar	0.000353	0.000466	0.0231

Source: Reuters' forex closing prices as of NY Time Dec. 19, 2006

* Various banks in Bahrain as quoted in Reuters' Screen.

** Asian Time Closing Rate as of Dec. 19, 2006

THE FORT

RESIDENCES

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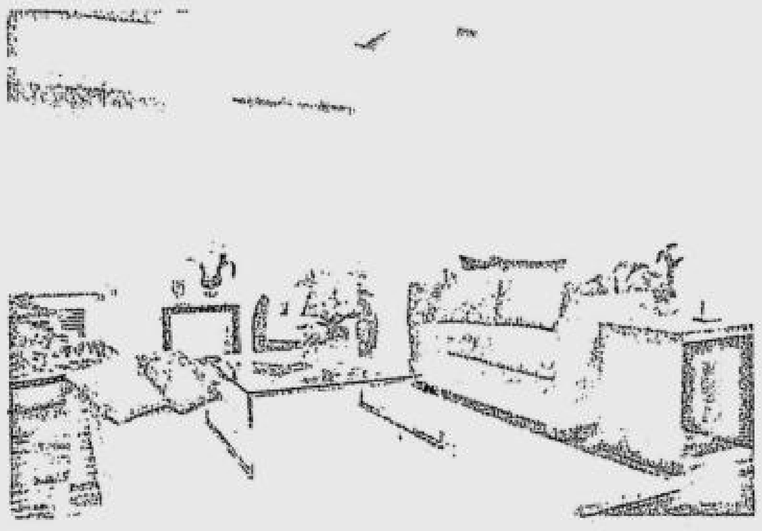

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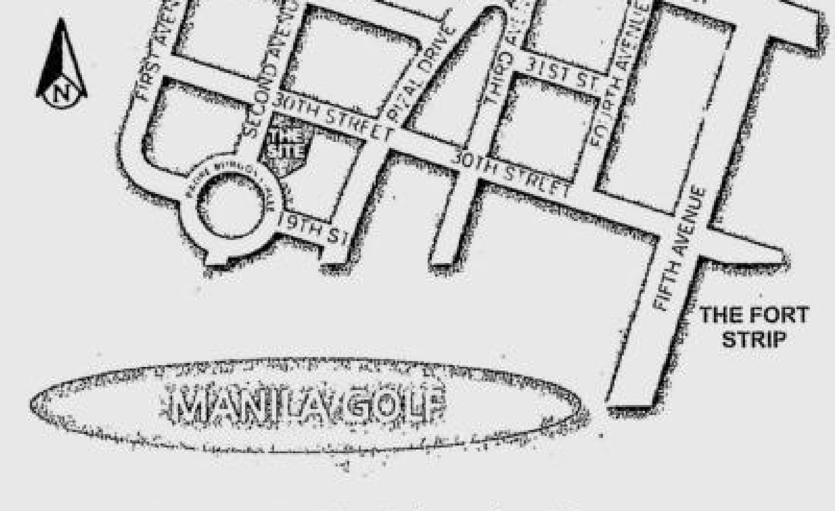
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Baht bungle tarnishes Thai economic czar

BANGKOK—WHEN HE LED THAILAND'S central bank, Pridiyathorn Devakula was highly regarded as a fierce defender of the bank's independence while keeping financial markets stable.

Now, that reputation appears in tatters after a bungled bid to rein in a surging baht triggered the biggest stock selloff in 16 years and shattered the credibility of Thailand's economic leadership.

"He was walking on water before this event. It's given Pridiyathorn a major beating," said Andrew Stotz, head of Thailand Research for Citicorp Securities in Bangkok.

Pridiyathorn assumed the role of finance minister and economic czar after a bloodless Sept. 19 coup ousted Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra.

After five years as head of the Bank of Thailand, he was considered a safe pair of hands on the economic tiller while the economically illiterate coup leaders focused on politics.

In his old job, Pridiyathorn won considerable respect for resisting political pressure and becoming one of the region's most hawkish central bankers with an aggressive series of interest rate rises to tame inflation.

But on Tuesday, the now finance minister went on television to announce a partial roll-back of the baht controls imposed by his successor, Tarisa Watanagase, a 31-year bank veteran who has been in her new job for two months.

"A lesson has been learned, but no one needs to be responsible for this," Pridiyathorn said after the market plunged nearly 15 percent, its sharpest one-day fall in 16 years.

But Pridiyathorn's failure to foresee the chaos wrought by the controls has put his political future on the line, analysts and Thai newspapers said.

"Can he survive what other politicians normally wouldn't after a one-day stock market collapse of almost 20 percent?," the Nation newspaper asked in a commentary.

"His enemies are now picking up their knives."

Born to an aristocratic family in 1947, Pridiyathorn's background permits him the honorific title "Mom Ratchawong" reserved for royal descendants.

He obtained an MBA from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania and was a top executive at a major Thai bank in the 1970s and 1980s.

Soon after joining the Bank of Thailand, he shocked financial markets by announcing a 100-basis point rise in interest rates.

He later rolled it back by 25 basis points in an abrupt reversal that left investors scratching their heads.

Tuesday's policy U-turn came after Pridiyathorn had boasted before the central bank's announcement on Monday that it would be a "historic" move to rein in the baht. *Reuters*

Asian stocks recover as Thailand backs down on currency controls

HONG KONG—ASIAN STOCKS yesterday bounced back from sharp falls after Thailand's military government backed down on imposing harsh currency controls which saw Bangkok shares lose a massive 15 percent.

The flip-flop and a steady performance on Wall Street overnight had investors chasing bargains following Tuesday's sell-off amid chaos in Thailand and echoes of the 1997 Asian financial crisis.

"The market is up on a recovery from yesterday's shocker," said Gabriel Yap, a dealing director with Phillip Securities in Singapore. "It's not something that will have a systematic hold on the market."

Late Tuesday, Thai Finance Minister Pridiyathorn Devakula was forced into an embarrassing policy U-turn after an unprecedented 23 billion dollars was wiped off the value of Thai listed companies in one day.

The rout was triggered after the military-backed government imposed capital controls in an effort to check the increasing pressure a rising currency was putting on exports, a key driver for the economy.

The punitive measures in practice stopped foreign fund inflows dead into a market where they had been very important and Pridiyathorn, formerly a central bank governor, declared an exemption on stock investments.

A THAI investor monitors stock prices at a private stock trading floor in Bangkok on Wednesday. Thailand's stock market opened nearly 9 percent higher Wednesday, recovering from a historic fall that shook regional markets and sparked concerns over another Asian financial crisis. AP

In Bangkok—where foreign investors account for about 40 percent of the market—the Stock Exchange of Thailand (SET) responded immediately and was up 10.61 percent at noon, with benchmarks elsewhere following suit.

"With the change, foreign investors can continue to invest in the Thai stock market. Sentiment is really positive," said Sukit Udomsirikul, a senior market analyst at Siam City Securities.

However, investors remain less than impressed with the government which was installed through a bloodless coup in September that ousted prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, a former telecoms tycoon known for his business savvy.

"It really damages the government's credibility. You cannot suddenly change important regulations overnight," said Sukhbir Khanijoh of Kasikorn Securities.

Krungthep Thurakit, a leading Thai business daily, demanded someone should take responsibility for the mess, adding: "It was the most expensive economic lesson for Thailand since the financial crisis in 1997."

Around the region, the reaction was one of relief. Among Thailand's closest neighbors, Singapore was up 2.20 percent, Kuala Lumpur gained 0.90 percent, Jakarta rose 1.85 percent while Mumbai opened up 0.84 percent.

In early afternoon trade, Hong Kong was 1.43 percent higher while Seoul closed up 1.02 percent, with dealers saying the impact from the Thai debacle on local equities had fizzled out.

The capital controls were reminiscent of the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis when excessive borrowings in US dollars coupled with high interest rates forced the Thai government to float the currency.

The baht then promptly collapsed along with the economy and the contagion spread across the region. Currencies and stock markets failed as businesses went bankrupt and recessions followed, with governments frantic to shore-up their economies.

Central bankers and governments played down suggestions that their countries might follow Bangkok's latest lead and ruled out any repeat of the havoc that engulfed East Asia in the late 1990s.

Harry Su, head of research at BNP Paribas said from Jakarta the knee-jerk reaction to the controls on Tuesday was largely because of the spectre of the financial crisis in 1997 and 1998.

"Indonesia is close to Thailand and the local market has been one of the best performing markets in the year-to-date," he said. "The Thai government has basically scaled back part of its policy so that is positive for the markets."

Elsewhere, benchmarks tended to follow local factors resulting in Tokyo closing up 1.40 percent and above the critical 17,000 points mark while Sydney and Wellington registered solid gains to close at record highs. *AFP*

Peso, other Asian currencies bounce back

By Doris C. Dumlao

THE PESO YESTERDAY RECUPERATED from a fall on Tuesday as spillover jitters over Thailand's initiative to temper the baht's strong ascent fizzled out across the regional currency markets.

The peso closed stronger at 49.375 against the US dollar at the Philippine Dealing System, 34.5 centavos higher than the previous day's finish of 49.72 to the US dollar.

This developed after Thailand—the epicenter of the Asian currency turmoil of 1997—backtracked on its plan to restrict capital flows, saying it would exclude equities investments from a central bank measure aimed at curbing currency speculation. This was after the Thai stock market suffered its worst fall in 16 years.

In the Philippines, the financial markets heaved a sigh of relief following the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas' swift assurance that it would not replicate Thailand's bold move.

"It is way too early for monetary officials to be concerned about the color of money pouring in. As far as we can see, they will openly welcome that which flees from next-door," Deutsche Bank strategist Anton Periquet said in a recent commentary.

He said one could quickly draw the line as to whether Philippine economic managers were anywhere near thinking of measures to discourage portfolio inflows, also known as "hot money" due to their volatile nature.

On Monday night, the Thai central bank unveiled a strategy to discourage the influx of short-term money in the local financial system. It required 30 percent of nontrade related foreign exchange sold for baht to be deposited interest-free with the central bank for a year. Those pulling out funds earlier than one year would be refunded only two-thirds of the amount.

"It was only yesterday that nobody wanted to put any money in Philippine stocks. Net foreign capital inflows have indeed grown since then but at $1.6 billion this year, the economy can hardly be described as swimming in dollars," Periquet said.

He noted that daily stock market turnover was averaging a mere $50 million, a tenth of how much Thailand was getting.

"This decade's IPO (initial public offering) cycle has hardly started, with only eight companies having gone public in the last three years," he said.

Periquet noted there was always a tendency for investors to treat Thailand, Indonesia and the Philippines—or TIP—as a single basket.

"Apart from having similar economic characteristics, a significant chunk of foreign portfolio investment in their stock markets are run by the same managers—TIP fund managers. So it is of no coincidence that euphoria in one market quickly spills over to the others," he said.

Dow Jones at record as Exxon gains; Oracle hurts Nasdaq

NEW YORK—THE DOW JONES industrial average finished at a record high on Tuesday, spurred by a rise in oil prices that boosted shares of Exxon Mobil Corp.

But the Nasdaq fell as technology stocks dropped after disappointing financial results from industry bellwether Oracle Corp.

Investors also discounted a bigger-than-expected jump in November producer prices. The key inflation gauge registered its biggest gain in 32 years and initially sent stocks lower, but investors ultimately decided the PPI report was benign and would not lead the Federal Reserve to alter monetary policy.

"People are positive that growth is fine and inflation is going to be under control," said Neil Massa, senior trader at John Hancock Funds in Boston.

"Technology is pressured mainly by the negative headlines around earnings by some big technology companies. It's nothing to do with the overall environment." The Dow Jones industrial average rose 30.05 points, or 0.24 percent, to end at a record 12,471.32. The Standard & Poor's 500 Index advanced 3.07 points, or 0.22 percent, to finish at 1,425.55. But the Nasdaq Composite Index slipped 6.02 points, or 0.25 percent, to close at 2,429.55.

The Dow hit an all-time high of 12,491.91 in intraday trading. Tuesday marked the Dow's 21st record close since the start of October.

Shares of Exxon Mobil shot up 2 percent, or $1.48, to close at $76.99 on the New York Stock Exchange. The stock contributed the most to the gains in both the Dow and the S&P 500. The CBOE Oil Index rose 1.5 percent.

US crude oil for January delivery rose 94 cents, or 1.5 percent, to settle at $63.15 a barrel on the New York Mercantile Exchange. The rise in oil prices was attributed to expectations that US crude inventories fell in the past week due to shipping delays along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico.

US oil inventory data will be released on Wednesday.

Investment bank Morgan Stanley reported results that topped analysts' estimates and announced it will spin off its Discover credit card unit.

Morgan Stanley's stock was up 1.7 percent, or $1.33, at $81.70 on the NYSE. It ranked among the S&P 500's biggest advancers.

Shares of Oracle were the heaviest drag on the Nasdaq 100 after the database software maker reported disappointing sales late on Monday. Oracle shares fell 4.5 percent, or 81 cents, to $17.10.

An unexpected quarterly loss from electronics retailer Circuit City sparked worries about retail store profits during the holiday shopping season. Its shares fell 17.5 percent, or $4.04, to $19.01 on the New York Stock Exchange. Shares of rival Best Buy Co. Inc. fell 1.6 percent, or 79 cents, to $48.55 and the S&P Retail Index was off 0.6 percent.

Investors also were jittery after a steep drop in Thai stocks overnight after the government imposed capital controls to rein in its baht currency. The Thai government later withdrew its restrictions on foreign investment in its stock market.

Home builders' shares fell across the board after Hovnanian Enterprises Inc. posted a quarterly loss and gave a weak outlook, sending its stock down nearly 2 percent, or 69 cents, to $34.56.

The Dow Jones US Home Construction Index fell 1.4 percent.

Trading was active on the New York Stock Exchange, where about 1.57 billion shares changed hands, slightly below last year's daily average of 1.61 billion.

On the Nasdaq, about 2.04 billion shares were traded, exceeding last year's daily average of 1.80 billion.

Advancing shares beat decliners on the NYSE by a ratio of about 6 to 5, while on the Nasdaq, more than eight stocks fell for every seven that rose. *Reuters*

Bank's entrepreneurship campaign focuses on women

By Tina Arceo-Dumlao

CORPORATE CITIZEN

THE ODDS OF STUDENTS landing good-paying jobs when they graduate are unfortunately slim.

Data from the Center for Asia Pacific Studies showed that of the 100 children who enroll in first grade, only 14 will earn college degrees. And only one in 10 of the graduates will get employed.

There is, however, an alternative to scrambling for the few available jobs, and that is to become an entrepreneur.

This is the message that GE Money Bank, the consumer financial services unit of General Electric Co., wants to impart to female college students through its Women Entrepreneurship Program in partnership with the Let's Go Foundation.

"We are committed to helping transform job seekers into job creators through entrepreneurial education," GEO Money CEO Ben Kua said in a statement. "Let's Go identified an opportunity for us to bring an important education and community solution to an important issue in the Philippines."

Let's Go is a nonprofit, nonstock organization that advocates entrepreneurship through education. It conducts research, curriculum development, training of teachers and production of teaching materials.

The Women Entrepreneurship Program was launched early this month and the first phase of the program involves generating baseline data on the state of entrepreneurship among women today, as well as their needs and aspirations.

GE Money assistant vice president for communications Eric Montelibano said the study was expected to be completed in January next year.

The results would then be used as basis for developing a curriculum centered on entrepreneurship to be used in women's colleges, such as Assumption College, St. Scholastica's College and Miriam College.

The objective is to encourage the students to look at entrepreneurship as a real option when they graduate.

Instead of looking for jobs, they can create jobs, said Montelibano.

Focus on women

Montelibano added that GE Money expected to start training the teachers on the new curriculum as soon as the school year ends next year and, hopefully, to begin teaching entrepreneurship in women's colleges by school year 2007-2008.

GE Money focuses on women because of their growing interest to put up their own businesses.

"Statistics indicate an increasing growth in the number of women in small, medium enterprises. Because they are growing, we want to improve the quality and thus increase the contribution of women enterprises in society," said Jay Bernardo, founder of Let's Go Foundation in a statement.

To inspire the students, GE Money and Let's Go will also work on the production of teaching materials featuring the stories of women entrepreneurs, as well as a website on and for women entrepreneurs to ensure continuous learning.

Montelibano said the Women Entrepreneurship Program was just the first of many projects that GE Money hoped to get involved in as it grows its business in the Philippines.

GE MONEY Bank officials discuss business concepts with Miriam College students

"We went into entrepreneurship because it is aligned with GE Money's operations, and we believe that the financial empowerment of women is a sustainable project," Montelibano said.

GE Money and Let's Go believe that through this program, they would be able to help ensure the success of women entrepreneurship in the Philippines.

BIR says 2006 target unrealistic, wants it lowered to ₱601.4B

By Michelle V. Remo

STILL BURDENED BY A HUGE SHORTFALL as of November, the Bureau of Internal Revenue insisted that its tax collection target for 2006 should be slashed by more than 10 percent to only P601.4 billion.

The national government has set an official target of P675.4 billion for the BIR, or 25-percent higher than its previous year's collection, to help achieve the state's deficit-reduction goal.

As of end-November, the BIR was off track its full-year goal. Tax collection stood at only P594.1 billion, or P27 billion lower than the P621-billion official target for the 11-month period.

The January-to-November collection figure also meant that the BIR should still collect P81.3 billion in the remaining month of December to meet its full-year tax collection goal of P675.4 billion.

But Internal Revenue Commissioner Jose Mario Buñag said the target was set based on certain macro-economic assumptions that did not materialize. The target should therefore be made flexible with changes in the macroeconomic figures.

He noted that of its full-year tax collection goal, P49 billion was assumed to be taxes on government securities. Buñag said this should not be part of the BIR's target because it has no control over the volume of treasury bills and bonds issued by the government.

Buñag said the lower-than-expected issuance of government securities was one of the reasons the BIR was having difficulty meeting its monthly tax collection goals. The cancellation of some auctions for government securities was due to the government's declining borrowing requirement caused by an improved fiscal condition.

The BIR chief also said that P25 billion of the revenue agency's P675.4-billion target was based on a certain assumed volume of production by oil companies. Oil products are imposed the value-added tax and excise tax.

But Buñag said domestic oil production had been lower than expected partly because Caltex decided to close its refinery in the Philippines and instead import its oil requirements. The P25-billion revenue target from oil should therefore be transferred to the Bureau of Customs, which collects duties from imports, Buñag said.

By deducting the P49 billion in expected tax collection from government securities and the P25 billion from oil production, Buñag said, then the BIR's full-year tax collection goal should only by P601.4 billion.

"This (P601.4 billion) should be our true and fair goal," he said.

Finance Secretary Margarito Teves agreed that the shortfall arising from the lower-than-expected government securities issuances was understandable and that the BIR should not be held accountable for it.

But Teves noted that the BIR's total shortfall was not solely due to lower volume of government securities issued. He said that of the P27-billion shortfall in January-to-November, only P11 billion was attributable to treasury bills and bonds, while the bigger amount of P16 billion due to the BIR's own operations.

Another official from the Department of Finance, head agency of the BIR, said removing the assumed tax collection from government securities from the BIR's total target would not be justified.

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FirstPac closer to raising PLDT stake

By Riza T. Olchondra

HONG KONG-BASED FIRST PACIFIC CO. LTD. is closer to strengthening its hold on telecommunications giant Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. (PLDT) as the Presidential Commission on Good Government (PCGG) formally received 111,415 indirect PLDT shares from the government-owned Philippine Telecommunications Investment Corp. (PTIC).

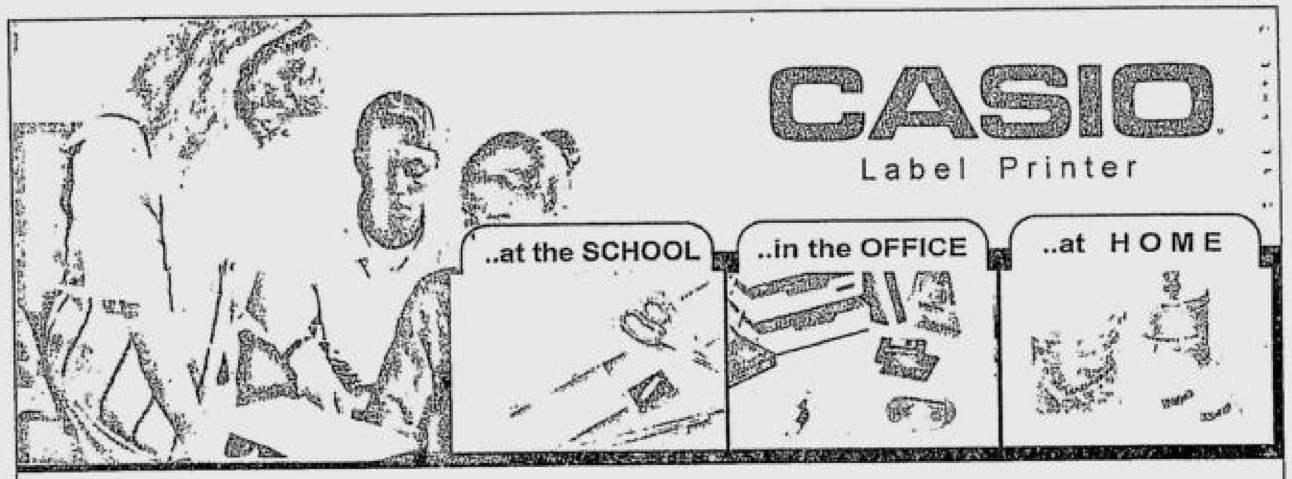
The Supreme Court in January this year ruled that the PTIC shares should be transferred to the government for being part of the ill-gotten Marcos wealth.

"After 20 long years of legal battle, from the Sandiganbayan to the Court of Appeals and on to the Supreme Court, the PCGG has finally secured these shares, which will be used for the public good," PCGG chair Ricardo M. Abcede said in a briefing.

The government has offered to sell the PTIC shares, which are valued at between P25 billion and P29 billion, through a public auction. The shares correspond to a 6.4-percent stake in PLDT.

Singaporean hedge fund Parallax Venture Fund XXVII submitted the highest bid of P25.2 billion for the government's PITC shares. The offer was equivalent to P2,100 a share of PLDT held by PTIC. This was lower than the closing price of PLDT at P2,440 on Dec. 15.

First Pacific, which has the right to match offers for the shares, has vowed to equal the Parallax bid in a joint bid with Japan's telco giant NTT DoCoMo, which has a 13-percent stake in PLDT.



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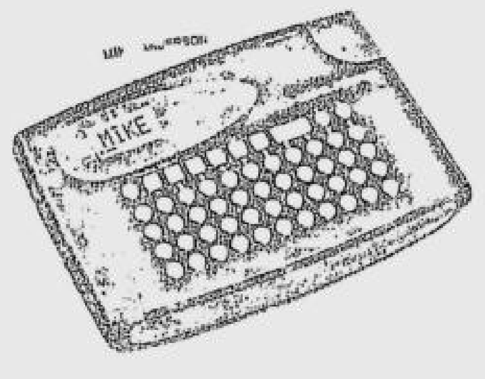

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Education crisis seen . . .

From page B1

years to 12 years—a controversial proposal that has been met with howls of protest from certain sectors in the past.

"In five to six years, the impact of the crisis will hit us hard," PBEd executive director Chito B. Salazar said during a press briefing. "By then, we will have students graduating from grade six without reading skills."

PBEd brings together several business organizations, business-based advocacy groups, corporations and industrialists with the aim of reforming the education system.

The group is the business community's response to the need for consensus and sustained advocacy in education reform, Salazar said.

The first component of the agenda calls for the business sector to advocate reforms that will make every school continuously perform better; get all teachers to continuously improve their teaching practices; adopt a 12-year cycle for formal basic education; continue the enrichment of curriculum development in the context of pillars of new functional literacy, and to provide public funding for the country-wide attainment of goals.

Salazar, who also heads Arellano University, said that it would take at least five years before improvements in the education system manifest themselves, given that the reform measures would start immediately.

Earlier, the group warned that the poor quality of education many Filipinos receive would eventually erode the abilities and skills of local workers.

This, in turn, would cap the competitiveness of local businesses in an increasingly globalized and competitive world.

"This is very important for us as a country because people are our number one resource," Salazar said, explaining that the country has managed to transform itself into a service-oriented economy in recent years.

This early, however, the group's push for lengthening the education cycle has already received a lukewarm response from education authorities.

In particular, Education Secretary Jesli Lapus expressed hesitation over the plan to add two more years to the country's basic education curriculum.

"I want to look more at the pre-school level because the highest dropout rates come from grades one to three," he said in an interview, explaining that he was biased toward trying to solve the problem before the middle school and high school years.

"The plan for a 12-year education cycle is still up for discussion," he said.

Lapus said the local situation was not as bleak as it seemed, noting that improvements were being made every year, including recent initiatives toward increasing the number of classrooms, reducing the teacher-pupil ratio and providing more computers to public schools.

The education chief said that the education system's problem was primarily one of a lack of resources instead of simply a misallocation of resources.

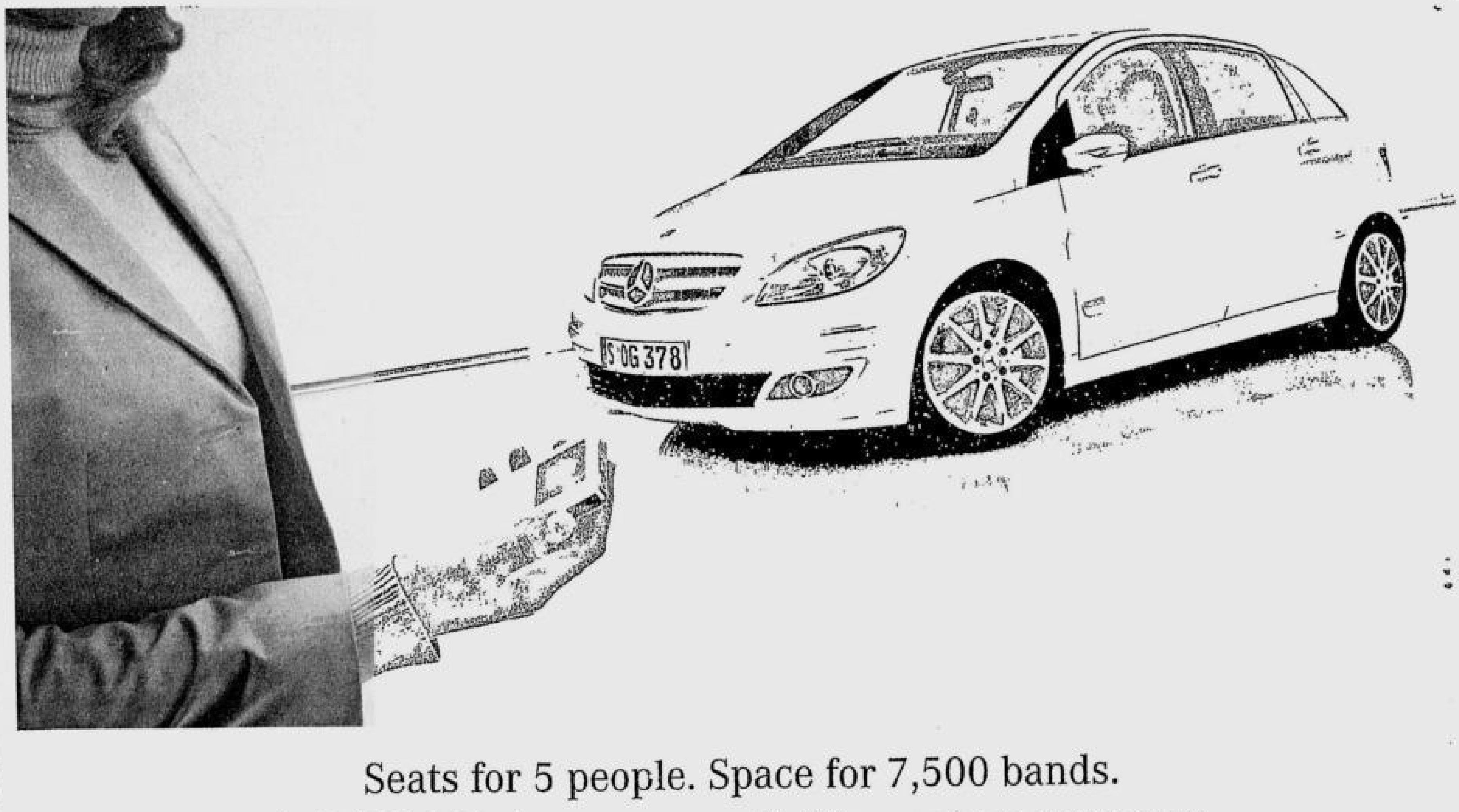
PBEd, on the other hand, believes that there was a need to both increase the resources made available to the education sector as well as to help them allocate these resources more efficiently.

"Our neighbors in the Asean spend 20 percent of their budget on education while we allocate only 12 percent," Lapus said.

PBEd's Salazar said his group would continue to dialogue with the leadership of the education department to ensure that the long-term programs remain in place regardless of who is running the education department.

"We have to remember that the average tenure of a Department of Education secretary is only 18 months," he said.

Other members of the PBEd founding board include Magdaleno B. Albarracin Jr., Jaime Augusto Zobel de Ayala II, Jose L. Cuisia Jr., Ramon R. del Rosario Jr., Paul G. Dominguez, Oscar J. Hilado, Monico V. Jacob, Oscar M. Lopez, Warner Manning, Placido Mapa Jr., Aurelio M. Montinola III, Rizalino S. Navarro, Manuel V. Pangilinan, Ricardo J. Romulo, Washington Z. Sycip, Tony Tan Caktiong and George T. Yang.



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Per DTI-NCR Permit No. 4934 Series of 2006

Office of the President

BCDA

Bases Conversion and Development Authority

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY

Republic of the Philippines

Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway Project

BCDA's Outsourcing of the Operation and Maintenance of the Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway (SCTEx) from a Single Service Provider

1. The Bases Conversion and Development Authority (BCDA) intends to bid out the Contract for ***the BCDA's Outsourcing of the Operation and Maintenance (O&M) of the Subic-Clark-Tarlac Expressway (SCTEx) from a Single Service Provider*** (the "Contract"). An Approved Budget for the Contract (ABC) in the amount equal to 12.2% of the 10-year Projected Toll Revenues has been set aside to cover payments for the purpose. The Contract particularly involves the provision of the following support services: Toll Collection; Traffic Management; Roadway Maintenance; General Administration; and Greening and Landscaping. Bids received in excess of the ABC shall be automatically rejected at the opening of the financial proposals.

2. BCDA now calls for the submission of Letters of Intent (LOIs) from potential bidders to apply for eligibility. Interested firms may submit either in person, through mail or facsimile, their LOIs on 21 to 29 December 2006, 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at the address given below and secure the Eligibility Documents therefrom upon payment of a non-refundable fee in the amount of Pesos: Twenty-five Thousand only (PhP25,000.00). Application for eligibility will be evaluated on a "pass/fail" basis. The last day for the submission of the accomplished Eligibility Documents shall be 19 January 2007 until 12:00 noon, at the BCDA Corporate Center. Proponents are invited to witness the opening of the Eligibility Documents on 19 January 2007, 1:30 p.m. at the BCDA Corporate Center.

   Bases Conversion and Development Authority
   BCDA Corporate Center, 2/F Bonifacio Technology Center, 31st Street, Crescent Park West, Bonifacio Global City
   1634 Taguig City, Metro Manila

3. A Prequalification Conference among interested proponents is tentatively set on 04 January 2007, 10:00 a.m., at the BCDA Corporate Center. The BCDA Special Bids and Awards Committee (SBAC) shall draw up the prospective bidders from those who have submitted LOIs and have been determined as eligible. Bidding will be conducted through open competitive bidding procedures using non-discretionary pass/fail criteria.

4. Interested firms may obtain further information from:

   VICTOR V. ZABLAN
   Chairman, Special Bids and Award Committee for SCTEP
   Bases Conversion and Development Authority
   BCDA Corporate Center, 2/F Bonifacio Technology Center
   31st Street, Crescent Park West, Bonifacio Global City
   1634 Taguig City, Metro Manila
   Tel. No. 816-6666 loc. 110
   Website Address: www.bcda.gov.ph

   or contact Ms. Bambie L. Andal at telephone number 816-6666 loc. 124, facsimile no. 816-1043, or email address blandal@bcda.gov.ph.

5. The BCDA reserves the right to reject any and all bids, annul the bidding process or not award the contract, without incurring any liability to the affected bidder or bidders.

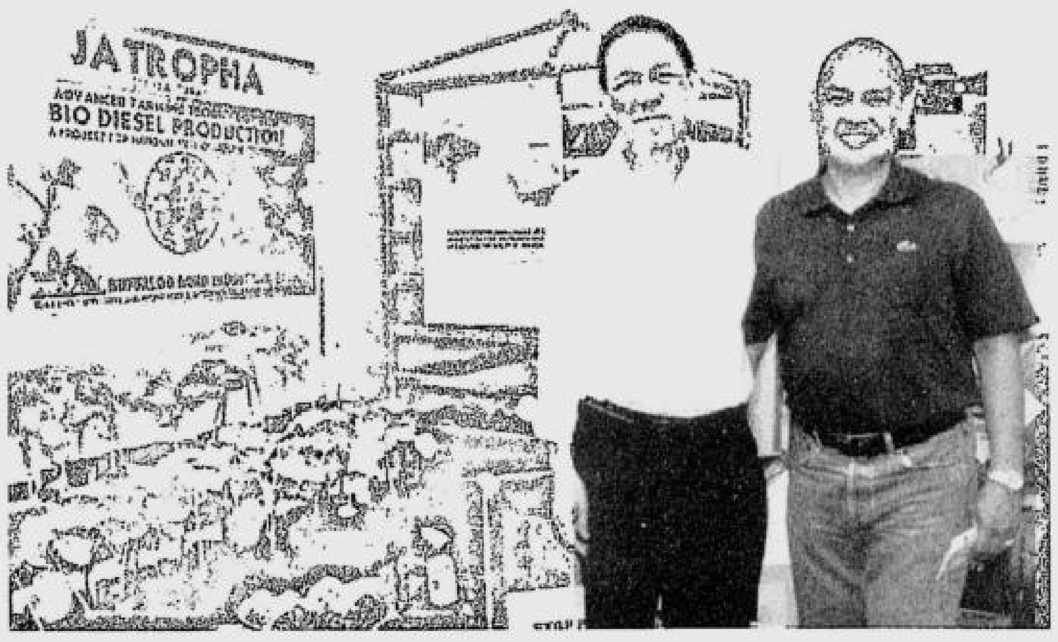
6. **THIS NOTICE HEREBY SUPERSEDES THE NOTICE ISSUED AND PUBLISHED ON 04 DECEMBER 2004 BY THE BCDA FOR THE BIDDING OF THE SAME CONTRACT.**

(Sgd.) VICTOR V. ZABLAN
Chairman, SBAC for SCTEP

(PDI--Dec. 21 & 27, 2006)

JATROPHA FEATURED AS SOURCE OF BIO-DIESEL AT NATIONAL INVENTORS WEEK EXPO

The expo at Philtrade, Roxas Blvd., Pasay City, during the recent National Inventors Week, featured booths showcasing the latest Filipino inventions and innovations. Among these was the booth of the Buffaloo Agro-Industrial Corp. which highlighted Jatropha for the production of bio-diesel. Shown in photo (left) are Popoy Pagayon, president of the Buffaloo Agro-Industrial Corp., a proponent of Jatropha propagation, and guest Bobby Factora. Jatropha (also called "tuba-tuba" in the dialect) is a drought-resistant, perennial plant that can live for 50 years. Its seeds yield oil that serve as bio-diesel fuel in some countries such as India, Thailand and Indonesia. In the Philippines, the government has an on-going project which aims to plant Jatropha in idle lands in selected public lands.



Republic of the Philippines
DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND EMPLOYMENT
National Capital Region
DY Int'l Bldg., 1650 San Marcelino
cor. General Malvar St., Malate, Manila

NOTICE OF FILING OF APPLICATION/S FOR ALIEN EMPLOYMENT PERMIT/S (AEP/S)

Notice is hereby given that the following companies/employers have filed with this Regional Office application/s for Alien Employment Permit/s:

Name and address of Company/Employer	Name of Foreign National	Position
FILACE MANAGEMENT CONSULTANCY CORP. Amber Square, No. 7 Escriva Dr., Ortigas Ctr., Pasig City	Choun Weon Kang	Comptroller
MING XIANG SEASON FOOD PRODUCT 437 Riverside St., San Rafael Village, Navotas, Metro Manila	Ziming Li	General Manager
VERIZON COMMUNICATIONS PHILIPPINES, INC. 17/F, The Enterprise Center, Tower 2, 6766 Ayala Ave., Makati City	Laura Sue Finney	Senior Staff Consultant-Network Operations
STARRY SKY CONSULTANCY CORPORATION P2 Hanston Bldg., F. Ortigas Rd., San Antonio, Pasig City	Nam Hyung Kim (w/o Kim)	Assistant Manager
TONG YANG SAVINGS BANK INC. G/F, Chatham House, 116 Valero cor. V.A. Rufino Sts., Salcedo Village, Makati City	Young Kyung Won	Korean Desk, Assistant Manager
UNOCAL PHILIPPINES, INC. 14/F, 6750 Bldg., Ayala Ave., Makati City	Anthony James Menzies	Coordinator, Reservoir Engineering
MAERSK ADMINISTRATIVE CENTER LIMITED 17/F, Wynsum Corporate Plaza, Emerald Ave., Ortigas Center, Pasig City	Pradeep James D' Souza	Head, Operations
PANASHE INT'L. NURSING REVIEW CENTER INC. Unit 1504 15/F Prestige Tower Condo., Emerald Ave., Ortigas, Pasig City	Ruponeso Hove	Consultant/Lecturer

If you have any information/objection to the abovementioned application/s please communicate with the Regional Director.

LOURDES M. TRASMONTE
Regional Director

(PDI–Dec. 21. 2006)

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
NATIONAL HOUSING AUTHORITY

NOTICE OF DISPOSITION

The National Housing Authority is inviting offers to lease by way of sealed bids a 12,209 square meter property, particularly identified as Portion of lot 5, Psd-003901-030710-D, with existing structure on an ***"As Is - Where Is"*** located at Vitas, Tondo Manila, at a lease rate of **PhP35.00 per square meter** (subject to adjustment upon approval of the new lease rate).

Interested parties may lease the lot & structure offered, details of which may be secured for a non-refundable fee of PhP200.00 from the COINBAC c/o CIED, Mezzanine Floor, NHA Building, Diliman, Quezon City. For inquiry, please call Ms Evelyn V. Ramos at the ff. tel. nos.: 923-0390, 922-3001 & 928-4561 loc. 302-303.

SCHEDULE

A.	**Submission of Pre-Qualification Requirements**	**December 22 to 28, 2006 office hours**
B.	**Pre-Bid Conference**	**Dec. 27, 2006 10:00 a.m. Operations Center, NHA Main Office**
C.	**Submission of Sealed Bids**	**January 3, 2007, 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon, Operations Center**
D.	**Opening of Bids**	**January 3, 2007, 1:30 p.m. Operations Center**

The NHA reserves the right to reject any or all bid offers or any part thereof or to waive any required formalities and accept offers most advantageous to the interest of NHA.

(Sgd.) **FROILAN R. KAMPITAN**
Assistant General Manager &
Chairman, COINBAC

(PDI - Dec. 21 & 24. 2006)

The Neophyte short drive classic

1st NORMAN STO. DOMINGO Golf Tournament will be held on Dec. 22, 8 a.m. at the Capitol Hill Golf and Country Club. The event open to amateur players of all ages and aspiring jungolfers, would serve as Citygolf's year-end culminating activity.

This tournament is sponsored by Gilbert and Melanie Cruz, Rolly Romeo, Citygolf, Wilson, Golfers Network, Beck Seung Hun, Jang Chung Ok, YSA Skin Care Center, Transview, Dynamic Sports Corp., Kim & Nicolai Abelar, Cong. Tony Alvarez, Pier 1 Bar & Grill, Manny Luzon, Tony Pancho, Mizuno, Book Craft Publishing Co. Inc and Key Printing Press Corp.

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OBITUARIES

"Only goodness and love will pursue me all the days of my life; I will dwell in the house of the Lord for years to come..." Psalm 23:6

PROCESA "TETA" BARLIS

Peacefully joined our Creator
on Tuesday, 19th of December 2006
at the age of 83.

Her husband **MECHOR (†)**; children **ARIEL (†)**, **EVA**, **CHRISTOPHER**, **MINDA** and **ESTRELLA**; daughters-in-law **Jean** and **Siewsiew**; grandchildren **Armand & Hannah**, **Alex & JayJay**, **Jhanice**, **Alain**, **Jenelle** and **Paula**; great grandchildren, nieces, nephews, relatives and friends request the pious readers to pray for the eternal repose of her soul.

Interment will be tomorrow, December 22, 2006
in Talavera, Nueva Ecija.

CESAR NARCISO NICOLAS

(Former Mayor, Bocaue, Bulacan)

Peacefully joined his Creator
on December 18, 2006 at the age of 63.

His bereaved wife, **Luming**; son, **Dennis**; daughter-in-law, **Leonila**; grandchildren, **Daphne** and **Danielle**; and all relatives and friends request the pious readers to pray for the eternal repose of his soul.

His remains lie in state at the Nicolas Ancestral House, Taal, Bocaue, Bulacan.

Interment will be on December 23, 2006, 3:00 p.m. at the Bocaue Catholic Cemetery.

"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life."
John 3:16

Death Notice

ANICETA MELO-FELIPE

April 17, 1923 - December 18, 2006

Her remains lie in state at the Sapinoso Grand Chapel, Col. J. Elises Street, Imus, Cavite.

Interment will be today December 21, 2006 at the Melda Memorial Park, Toclong 1, Imus, Cavite after the 2 p.m. memorial service at the Imus Unida Church.

IRENEA P. AGUSTIN

April 5, 1940 - December 18, 2006

Banadero, Ozamis City

Her remains lie in state at family residence, Banadero, Ozamis City, Misamis Occidental.

Interment will be announced later.

NOTICE OF TENDER OFFER TO THE STOCKHOLDERS OF VISAYAN ELECTRIC COMPANY, INC. (VECO)

To All Stockholders of VISAYAN ELECTRIC COMPANY, INC. ("VECO"):

Please be informed that on December 15, 2006, VECO filed a Tender Offer Statement (SEC Form 19-1) with the Securities and Exchange Commission (the "SEC") pursuant to Section 19 of the Securities Regulation Code in connection with its intention to acquire, at the price of Php 500.00 per share, 400,000 common shares of stock of VECO owned by stockholders constituting approximately 5.23% of the outstanding capital stock of VECO with par value of Php 200.00 per share. The consideration is payable in check not later than ten (10) business days after the termination of the tender offer ("Payment Date"), provided, however, that if any payment of the consideration is due on a day which is not a Business Day, such payment shall be due on the next succeeding Business Day. For this purpose, "Business Day" shall mean any day excluding (i) Saturday, (ii) Sunday and (iii) any day on which commercial banks in Cebu City, Philippines are authorized or required by law or other government action to close, or (iv) any legal holiday.

Stockholders as of November 30, 2006 (the "Record Date") may tender all or a portion of their VECO common shares for acceptance and purchase by VECO, subject to the Terms of the Tender Offer, beginning at 9:00 a.m. of December 19, 2006 until 3:00 p.m. of January 22, 2007 (the "Tender Offer Period").

Tendering stockholders of VECO who hold stock certificates should submit within the Tender Offer Period their duly endorsed stock certificates and two (2) copies of duly accomplished Application to Sell Shares, together with the following requirements to Tender Offer Staff at VECO Complex, J. Panis Street, Banilad, Cebu City with telephone no. (32)230-8326 (Contact Person: Ms. Jessel Travero):

For corporate stockholders:

1. Certified copies of the Articles of Incorporation and By-Laws of the stockholder and latest amendment/s thereof.
2. A notarized Secretary's Certificate setting forth resolutions of the tendering stockholder's Board of Directors authorizing the tender and sale of VECO shares and designating the signatories for the purpose.
3. A duly accomplished signature card containing the specimen signatures of its authorized signatories validated by its Corporate Secretary and verified by an officer of the bank where it is maintaining an account.

For individual stockholders:

1. Two (2) valid identification cards containing the specimen signature of the stockholder.
2. For stockholders acting through an attorney-in-fact, a duly notarized Special Power of Attorney. (N.B.: Endorsement of stock certificate/s must be made by the stockholder himself).

The Tender Offer Staff will submit the stock certificates for validation to the Office of the Corporate Secretary of VECO, c/o Atty. M. Jasmine S. Oporto, Aboitiz Corporate Center, Gov. M. Cuenco Avenue, Kasambagan, Cebu City, with telephone number (32) 231-2580. Defective applications (such as but not limited to those where there is a discrepancy between the specimen signatures on file and the endorsement) must be corrected within the tender offer period to avoid rejection. Hence, stockholders are strongly urged to tender their shares at the earliest possible time to ensure that any defect in the Application to Sell Shares may still be corrected. Stockholders are also urged to provide or indicate their telephone or contact numbers in their respective application forms to allow the Tender Offer Staff and Office of the Corporate Secretary to inform them immediately of any deficiency in their applications.

Tendering stockholders shall have the right to withdraw any tendered VECO common shares at any time during the Tender Offer Period or, if the tendered VECO shares have not been accepted for payment, up to sixty (60) days from commencement of the Tender Offer Period. For a withdrawal to be effective, a written notice of withdrawal must be timely received by the Tender Offer Staff at their addresses set forth above. The notice must specify the name of the tendering stockholder, the number of VECO shares to be withdrawn and the stock certificate numbers of the stocks covered by the withdrawal. The Tender Offer Staff or Corporate Secretary shall have the right in its sole discretion, to determine the sufficiency of the notice of withdrawal and the timeliness thereof.

The Tender Offer is further subject to the terms and conditions described in the Terms of the Tender Offer. Copies of the SEC Form 19-1 and the tender offer application kit may be obtained by VECO stockholders from the Tender Offer Staff.

This Notice is published in compliance with Section 19 of the Securities Regulation Code. Copies of this Notice, along with the Application to Sell Shares and the attachments shall be sent to the stockholders by post and/or private courier.

The external auditor of VECO, C. L. Manabat & Co., has confirmed that resources are available to satisfy full acceptance of the shares to be offered.

NOTE: YOU MAY CONSULT YOUR LEGAL AND/OR FINANCIAL ADVISER OR DIRECT INQUIRIES OR REQUESTS FOR CLARIFICATION TO THE TENDER OFFER STAFF OR THE OFFICE OF THE CORPORATE SECRETARY.

VISAYAN ELECTRIC COMPANY, INC.

By:

(Sgd.) **DENNIS N. A. GARCIA**
President

(PDI – December 19, 20 & 21, 2006)

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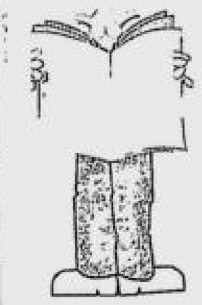

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Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas

Maynila, Pilipinas

BIDS AND AWARDS COMMITTEE

INVITATION TO APPLY FOR ELIGIBILITY AND TO BID

The BANGKO SENTRAL NG PILIPINAS (BSP), thru its Bids and Awards Committee (BAC), invites prospective modistes/textile suppliers for the following:

1. Supply of the design/s, materials and labor (Hecho Derecho) for the uniforms of the BSP female employees; and
2. Supply of the design/s and materials for the uniforms of the BSP male employees.

Details and Checklist of Eligibility Requirements may be obtained on 1 Dec 2006-12 Jan. 2007 from the BAC Secretariat upon submission of a letter of intent and payment of a non-refundable fee of P22,600.00.

Interested bidders must submit the eligibility requirements to the BAC, Room MR2A, 2nd Floor, 5-Storey Building, BSP Main Complex corner A. Mabini and P. Ocampo Sts., Malate, Maila, not later than 16 January 2007, 2:00 P.M.

Eligibility of prospective bidders shall be checked using a non-discretionary "pass/fail" criteria. Interested bidders must meet the following criteria:

1. Prospective bidders should have been in operation in the supply of clothing materials, design/s and sewing of office male and female uniforms for the last five (5) years (reckoned from the date of the advertisement/posting of this invitation).
2. Prospective bidders should have satisfactorily completed within the last five (5) years (reckoned from the date of the advertisement/posting of this invitation) at least two (2) contacts for the supply of clothing materials, design/s and sewing of office uniforms projects of similar nature as the subject BSP project.
3. The firm (partnership/corporation/joint venture) of the prospective bidder must be at least 60% owned by Filipino citizen.
4. For those firms with previous or current supply of clothing materials, design/s and sewing services contracts with the BSP, a certificate of satisfactory performance issued by the Bank should be submitted.

Ocular inspection of the shops and facilities of prospective modistes (female uniform) shall be conducted on those who comply with the eligibility requirements, and those who passed the ocular inspection shall be requested to submit samples of uniform materials and prototypes of uniform designs and only those who sample/s and prototype/s are found acceptable will be invited to participate in the bidding which will be conducted on a later date to be advised.

The provisions of Republic Act No. 9184 and its Implementing Rules and Regulations relative to the bidding and award of contract shall apply.

The BSP reserves the right to accept or reject any or all bid proposals, or declare the bidding a failure, or not award the contract and makes no assurance that a contract shall be entered into as a result of this invitation. Furthermore, BSP assumes no responsibility whatsoever to compensate/indemnify the bidders for any expenses incurred in the preparation of the bid

(Sgd.) JUAN DE ZUÑIGA, JR.
Chairman

(PDI – December 21, 2006)

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UCPB

BICOL UNIVERSITY

Legazpi City

NOTICE OF SEARCH FOR THE NEW UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT

The Bicol University Board of Regents has commenced the Search for a new University President to be appointed for a fixed term of four (4) years commencing on March 9, 2007, in accordance with the pertinent provisions of R.A. 8292.

Applicants must possess the following qualifications:

1. Must be a Filipino citizen
2. Preferably a holder of an earned doctoral degree
3. Preferably not more than sixty (60) years old at the time of application
4. At least five (5) years of relevant managerial and administrative experience
5. Morally upright
6. Has not been convicted by final judgment of any crime involving moral turpitude
7. Proven capability in resource generation and networking
8. Experience or involvement in community service

Required clearances, where applicable:

1. Ombudsman
2. Civil Service Commission
3. National Bureau of Investigation
4. Regional Trial Court
5. Provincial Prosecutor's Office

N.B. While the 1st two (2) clearances are required only from applicants who are already in government service, all applicants both from the government and private sectors must submit the last three (3).

Application/Nomination should be accompanied by:

1. Detailed Curriculum Vitae and documentary evidences supportive of qualifications.
2. Statement of Vision, Mission and Thrusts for Bicol University
3. Medical Clearance that include results of drug test
4. Result of Neuro-Psychiatric Examination in a sealed envelope

Deadline of submission: December 31, 2006

Submit applications including credentials with duly certified supporting documents in five sets to:

THE CHAIRPERSON
Search Committee for the BU Presidency
c/o Dr. Milagros S. Esparrago
Commission on Higher Education
Regional Office 5
EM's Barrio-South
Barangay 2
Legazpi City

Or, to:

OFFICE OF COMMISSIONER NENALYN P. DEFENSOR
c/o Ms. Jennilyn M. Salubayba
Commission on Higher Education
5th Floor, DAP Building
San Miguel Avenue
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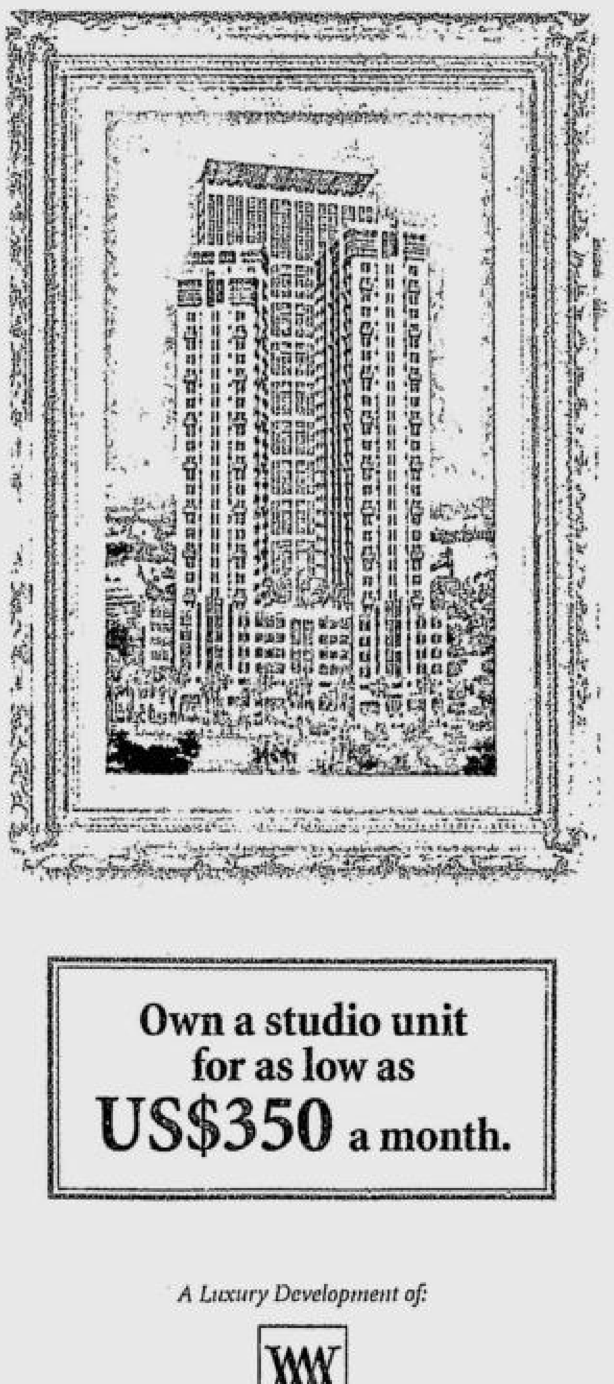

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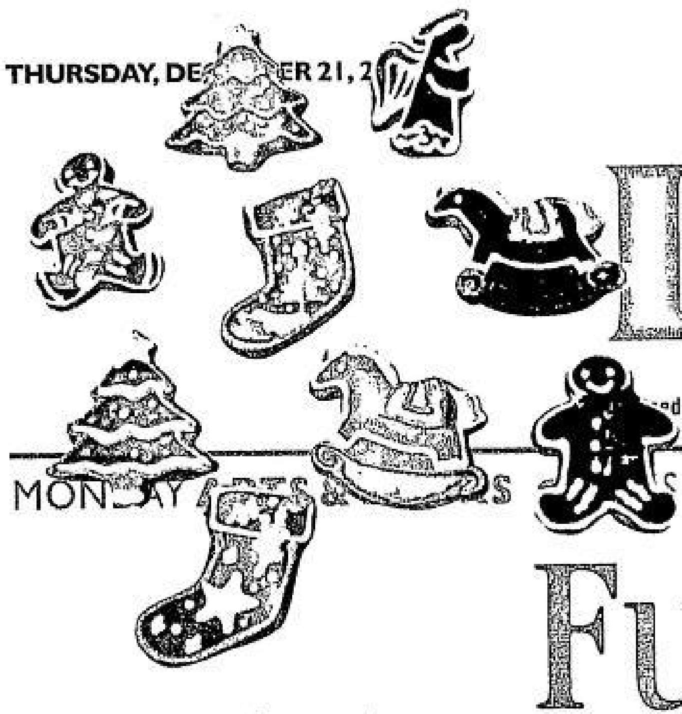

LIFESTYLE

Editor **Chelo Banal-Formoso**

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Fun Christmas baking

The gingerbread cookie has become as much a symbol of the yuletide season as the tree and Santa

STEP BY STEP

Text by Vangie Baga-Reyes
Photos by Roger Carpio

NO OTHER COOKIE IS AS symbolic of Christmas as the gingerbread man.

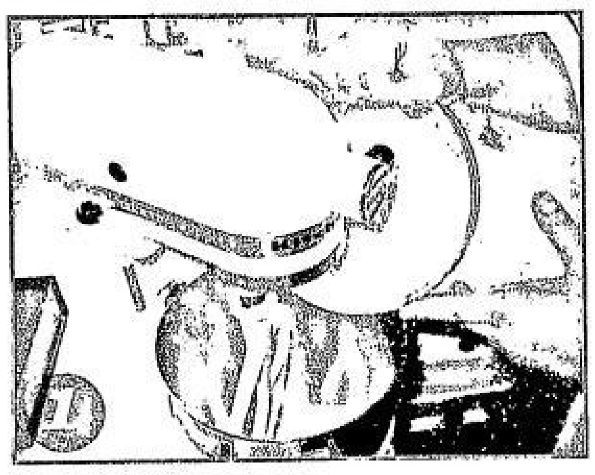
It is said the cookie dates back to the Middle Ages. Fair ladies reportedly presented the rather hard, honey-spice bread as a favor to dashing knights competing in tournaments. In those days, gingerbread was intricately shaped and decorated, sometimes with gold leaf.

Today, gingerbread can be a dense, ginger-spiced cookie flavored with molasses or honey and cut into fanciful shapes, such as the popular gingerbread man. Or, particularly in the United States, it can be a dark, moist cake flavored with molasses, ginger and other spices.

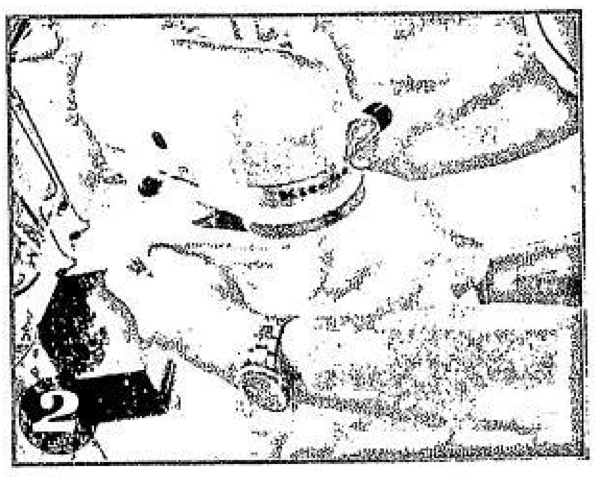
French Baker's Johnlu Koa, a doting father of three (Jonard, Clement and Julia), demonstrates the easiest way to make these cute holiday cookies so you can add this traditional Christmas symbol to your holiday celebration.

Though there are many variations on the

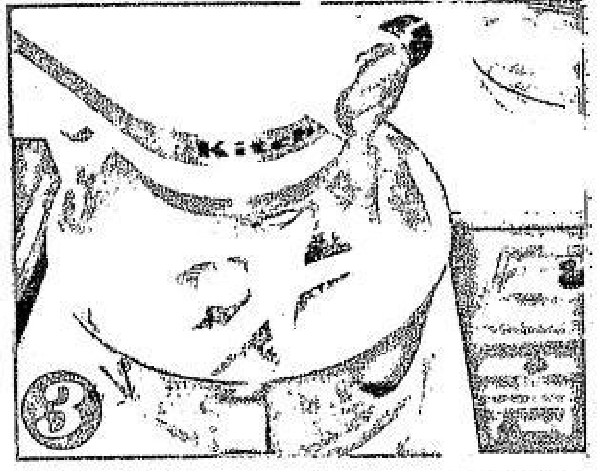
CHRISTMAS/ C4



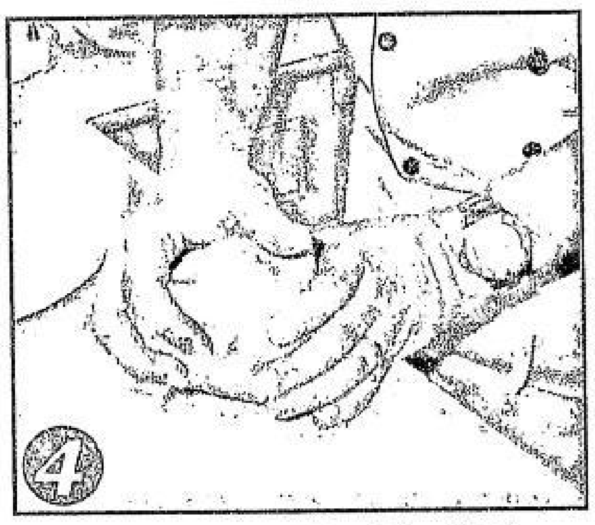
PREHEAT oven to 160°C. Using an electric mixer, beat together in low speed flour, baking soda, salt and cinnamon.



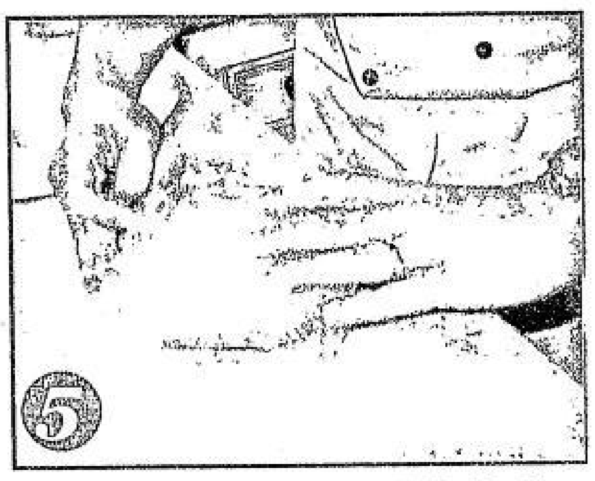
COVER bowl with a towel to avoid spill while mixing.



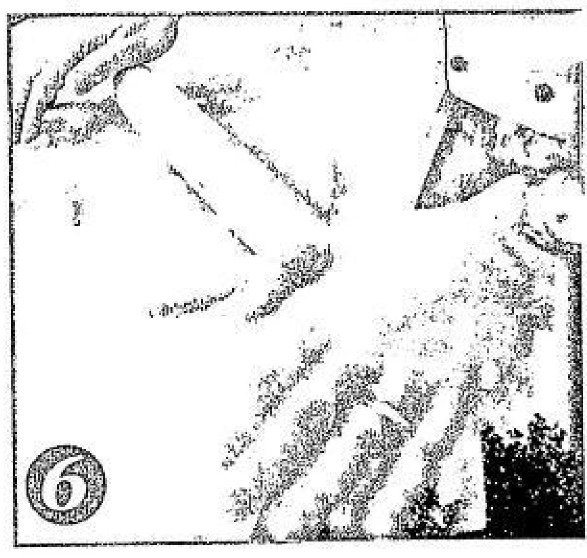
STIR in butter then mix until mixture resembles fine crumbs. Add sugar, syrup and egg yolk.



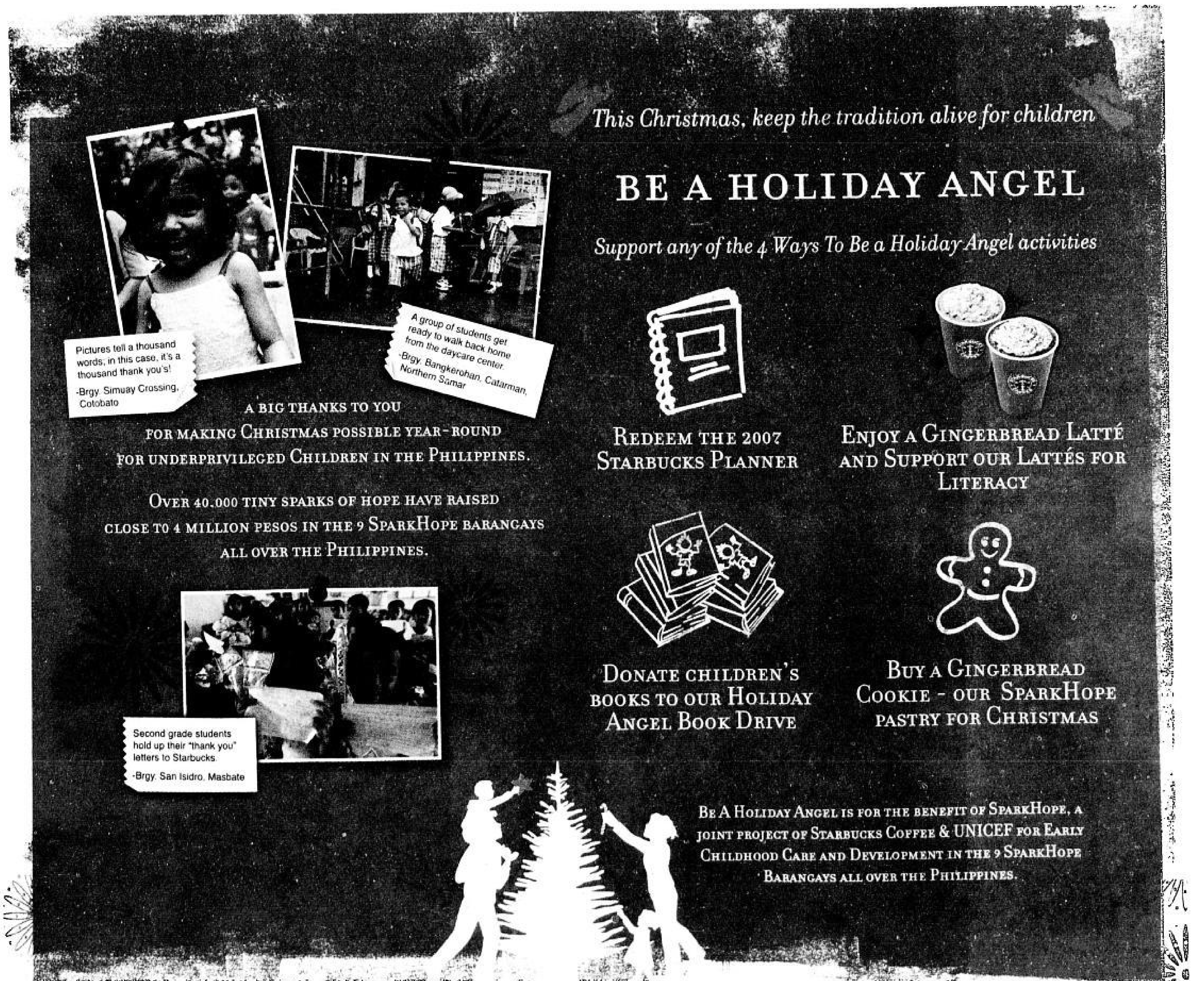
REMOVE dough from bowl. Knead dough lightly.



WRAP dough in plastic cling wrap. Chill for 30 mins to 1 hour. Meanwhile, make the royal icing. Using a wire whip, combine in a mixing bowl egg whites and powder sugar until well-mixed. Add a few drops of red, yellow or green food coloring. Deposit in a piping bag with piping tip with small round hole. Set aside.



REMOVE dough from chiller. Roll out dough to a ½-inch thickness.



Pictures tell a thousand words; in this case, it's a thousand thank you's!
-Brgy. Simuay Crossing, Cotobato

A group of students get ready to walk back home from the daycare center.
-Brgy. Bangkerohan, Catarman, Northern Samar

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OVER 40.000 TINY SPARKS OF HOPE HAVE RAISED
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ALL OVER THE PHILIPPINES.

Second grade students hold up their "thank you" letters to Starbucks.
-Brgy. San Isidro, Masbate

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COUNTRY COOKING

Micky Fenix

Filipino culinary inventions

MY INDONESIAN FRIEND, MONA BISHIER Valdes, was asked if there was such a thing as Java rice and *sate babe*. She was amused.

Since she comes from Java (she pronounces it Jawa), she knows definitely that there is no such thing as rice made brownish orange with either *achuete* or ketchup. And because most people from her country are Moslems, there can never be pork *sate*.

So where did *sate babe* and Java rice come from? Myrna Segismundo was asked that when she went on television to promote the Indonesian food festival, with Mona as featured cook, at Restaurant 9501.

Myrna was amused at her own answer: Aristocrat. It was what she and her generation remembered eating at this Reyes family restaurant founded when Roxas Boulevard was still called Dewey.

But the generation before Myrna's remembers Café Indonesia in the Ermita-Malate area. Conrad Calalang (of Barasoain and Seasons restaurants) told me that the restaurant was where he brought his dates because, with his allowance, he could afford the Java rice and *sate babe*, the cheapest items.

This was confirmed by Doreen Gamboa Fernandez in the book "Malate" (Bookmark, 2001): "Pete Alfonso served Indonesia food, which soon became part of our vocabulary... When funds dipped, the management allowed half-orders; two sticks of sate, a scoop of brownish rice and sauce, endlessly refillable."

No such thing

Refillable is now called bottomless by my sons' generation. They started this Filipino inventive cuisine rolling when one of them asked me, "Why is it that anything with pineapple is considered Hawaiian?" He was thinking of the Hawaiian pizza he just saw in the menu. His friend, who is from the "hula state," told him there's no such thing.

I can only guess that it had something to do with pineapple plantations in Hawaii. But it must also have been a Filipino who opened that pineapple can to make some concoction and read that the fruit was grown and canned in Hawaii, thereafter naming whatever he was cooking a Hawaiian something.

Guessing is hardly research but is really more fun. And, like Doreen said, those inventions have become part of the vocabulary.

Generations ago, someone named the Spanish sausage we love to cook with as *chorizo* Bilbao. Then someone decided to call the spring roll of ground pork as *lumpiang* Shanghai. Another person baptized his noodle dish *pancit* Canton.

The old joke of people who traveled generations ago was about trying to find such items in the places mentioned. The punch line: There's no such thing.

The Christmas season has made me think of *queso de bola*, another name that can't be found in anyone else's dictionary but ours. It's easy to see why Filipinos have given this edam cheese from Holland that name—it always is round in shape.

I liked the old packaging better when the cheese was placed in a round tin can. And the *queso de bola* of long ago also tasted so much better because it took a long time for the cheese to be transported. So, by the time it arrived here, it had matured. Today, the *queso de bola* is still soft and moist, a far cry from my *lolo's queso de bola*, which had a drier, sharper taste.

Two foreign dishes have also become Filipinized.

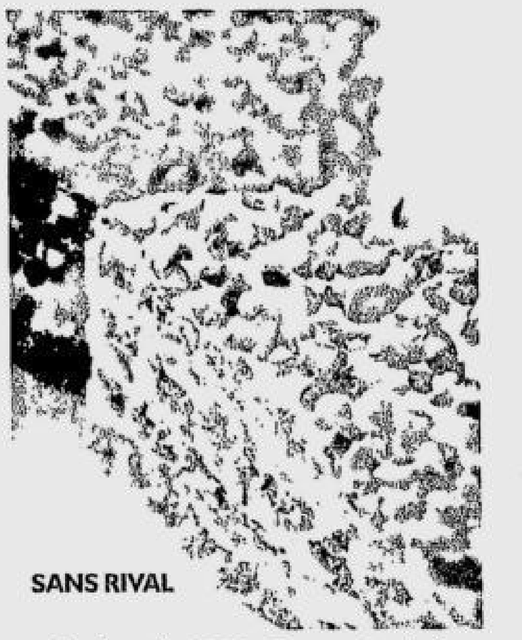
French 'import'

One is *sans rival*, a Filipino dessert with a French name. And it has to be pronounced the Filipino way or you won't be understood at the pastry shop.

Nora Daza in "A Culinary Life" (Anvil Publishing, 1992) surmised it must have been brought here by Filipino women who studied at the Ecole de Cordon Bleu in Paris because she saw a recipe for *Gateau sans Rival* in the school's cookbook dated 1895.

She also wrote that when she introduced the dessert at her Aux Iles Restaurant in Paris in 1973, she called it *Gateau Manille*.

Felice Sta. Maria included sans rival recipes in her book "The Governor General's Kitchen" (Anvil Publishing, 2006) that went way back to the 1930s. One version is from "Originales de Pacita Zamora de Mascunana" written in Spanish. The other is from an article in The Sunday Tribune Magazine (July 2, 1933) and was from the cake collection of the confectioner store called La Perla. The recipes used either almonds, cashew or *pili*.



SANS RIVAL

Today, Jill Sandique makes pistachio sans rival (Delize, call 7217022 during office hours).

The other Filipinized foreign food is spaghetti. Mention the word and what comes to mind are spaghetti strands cut up so they're easier to handle, the sauce reddish with a bit of meat and a sprinkling of grated cheese.

Now the meat may be chopped hot dog, the sauce may be ketchup and the grated cheese may be Quickmelt. But spaghetti (also called *ee-spa-get-ee*) will always mean that noodle dish cooked beyond al dente with the sweetish sauce.

Every generation adds to the Filipino culinary vocabulary. A more contemporary one should be the *pritchon*, the name itself already patented by those who first introduced it.

It's really fried piglet and the name is a contraction of the Filipino words that describe what it is—*piniritong lechon*. It borrows from the Peking duck idea of placing *lechon* slices into pancakes served with different sauces.

Can you think up of more?

E-mail the author at pinoyfood04@yahoo.com

THE CONSUMER

Kids' health is not to be toyed with

By Linda B. Bolido

FOR THE "STRAGGLERS" out there who still have to complete their shopping for gifts, particularly if there are kids on their lists, here is a reminder from the Ecowaste Coalition that is good to keep in mind not just this holiday season but the whole year round.

After all, gift-giving, especially for children, is not confined to Christmas. There are birthdays and graduations, Halloween and a few other events when kids expect presents.

Personally, I would suggest educational materials, especially books, if kids are starting to read. But if you must, if you have to, get toys, please heed Ecowaste's advice.

The coalition says, in buying toys, the safety of the children should be paramount. Make sure the stuff you get will not expose them to chemical harm, physical injuries or even death.

Lacking local statistics, the coalition cited a report from the United States Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) indicating that 202,300 toy-related injuries were treated in American hospital emergency rooms in 2005.

The same report found 20 toy-related deaths in the same year, involving children aged 15 months to 13 years. Of the fatalities, nine died due to choking. Others were drowned, struck, strangled, asphyxiated, or electrocuted while playing with toys.

The coalition reported that the European Parliament last year banned phthalates, toxic chemicals used to soften polyvinyl chloride (PVC) plastic.

Children can ingest phthalates when sucking on toys or baby items made with PVC. The chemicals are suspected to cause cancer and kidney damage and interfere with hormonal and reproductive development.

Ecowaste said, "Though not all plastic toys are duly marked, those with number '3' inside the recycling symbol are made of PVC plastic and should be avoided."

Helpful tips

The coalition offers the following suggestions when buying toys as gifts:

1. Choose toys that match the age, interest, aptitude, and skill of the recipient. Avoid inappropriate toys that may pose hazards to younger children.
2. Check the warning labels and instructions, particularly the age and safety recommendations. They should be readily understandable to you, and to the child, if he/she is already able to read.
3. Examine the label to make sure the toy does not contain toxic chemicals such as lead, PVC and other substances that may have adverse health effects.
4. Avoid toys with small or loose parts that can easily fall out and get swallowed, posing the risk of choking. Look for sturdy toys made of nonbreakable materials.
5. Make sure the toy's cords or strings are not too long that they may cause strangulation.
6. Avoid toys with sharp edges and points that can cause lacerations, contusions and abrasions.
7. Avoid excessively loud toys with no volume control. These can cause hearing impairment.
8. Keep toys' plastic wrappings, foam peanuts or paper strips away from children.

The coalition also urged consumers to report to the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) Consumer Hotline, 7513330, a toy that they suspected to be dangerous.

The coalition welcomed the re-filing by Senate President Manny Villar of the "Toy Safety Labeling Act" that would require warning labels in toys. It will require toy makers to provide product safety label as well as product information that will show if any of the materials used in manufacturing the toys is "toxic, corrosive, irritant, flammable, or combustible."

E-mail lbolido@inquirer.com.ph

DINING OUT

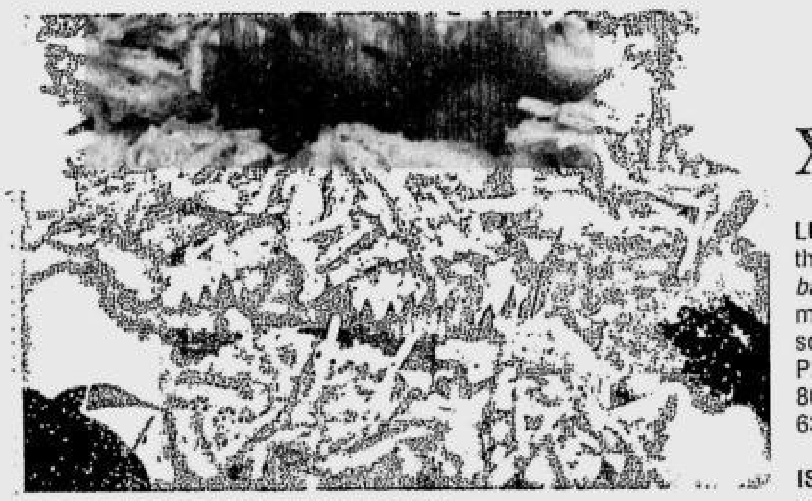
X'mas promos and buffets

LUK YUEN Noodle House offers three holiday treats for the family, *barkada* and officemates. Set menus are priced at P950 (4-6 persons); P1,650 (6-8 persons); and P2,280 (8-10 persons). Call 8671394, 8536966, 7212620, 6331610, 8432061 and 7723028.

ISLA PARILLA in Alabel, Sarangani, has unveiled a new menu. Starters include Tuna Kinilaw (P175), Ensaladang Mangga (P85), and Sashimi (P225). New creations are Sizzling Fish (P120) and Baked Clams (P170). Isla Parilla Bilao consists of Tuna Kinilaw, Ensaladang Mangga, Grilled Pork Belly, Grilled Tilapia, Chicken Barbecue and Steamed Prawn. Dessert includes Halo-halo in Buko.

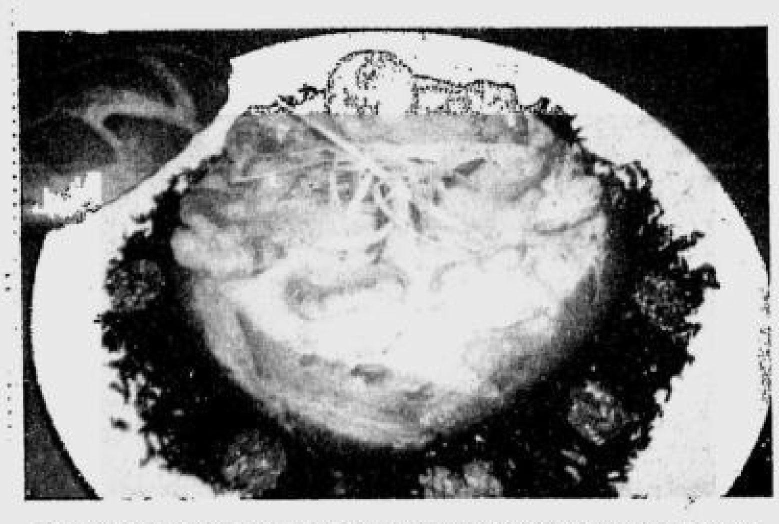
HULA-HULA Seafood and Barbecue House offers Luau Feast. All-time favorites include Jumbo Belly Chops and Pork Barbecue. Also available are the Island Sushi Selections and the Island Curry Plates. Hula-Hula has branches at Shangri-La Street Scape, Shangri-La Plaza Mall, Ortigas Center, Mandaluyong City (9103218) and Westgate, Filinvest City (7712291 or 7712289).

RED CRAB (2/L, Corte de las Palmas, Alabang Town Center, tel. 7722968) presents "Grand Holiday Buffet" with local and international dishes like Pineapple Glazed Hamonado, Oriental Beef Roulade, BBQ Tilapia Fillet, Lengua Sevillana, Maryland Crab Cakes, Roast Honey Pineapple Chicken and all-time favorite crab dishes. Other branches are at 104 Tomas Morato Ave., QC (tel. 3748406).

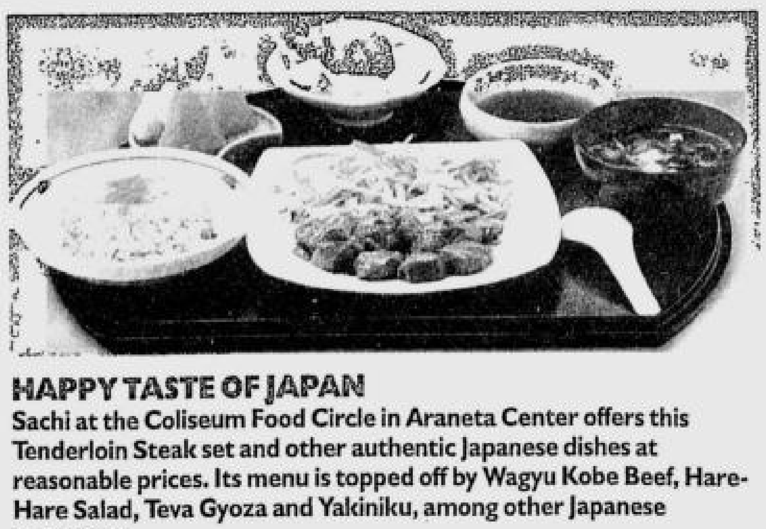


SAVORY JAPANESE DELIGHTS
Kimpura Japanese Restaurant presents its new Savory Delights Dishes consisting of tofu and tai (*lapu-lapu*) roll steak, *unagi* (eel) tempura, *onyako* tofu (with ground pork sauce), crunchy *ebi maki*, *kajiki* (blue marlin) belly *arai* and *hotate* shake (scallops and salmon) wasabi. Kimpura also offers set menus from P3,450+ to P9,950+ inclusive of appetizers, soup, main courses and desserts. Call 8924456, 8928274, 7218816 and 7218869.

HEAVEN and Eggs' new chef from the United States, Peter Ayson, introduces new dishes like Omelets, Chicken Chingladera (chicken omelet in tortilla wrap served with mashed potatoes), Green Eggs and Ham. Visit branches in CKB Building, Tomas Morato, QC (tel. 3762674); G/F Glorietta 4 (tel. 8182792); Fuente Circle in Eastwood City (tel. 9121172); and Market! Market! (tel. 8893791).

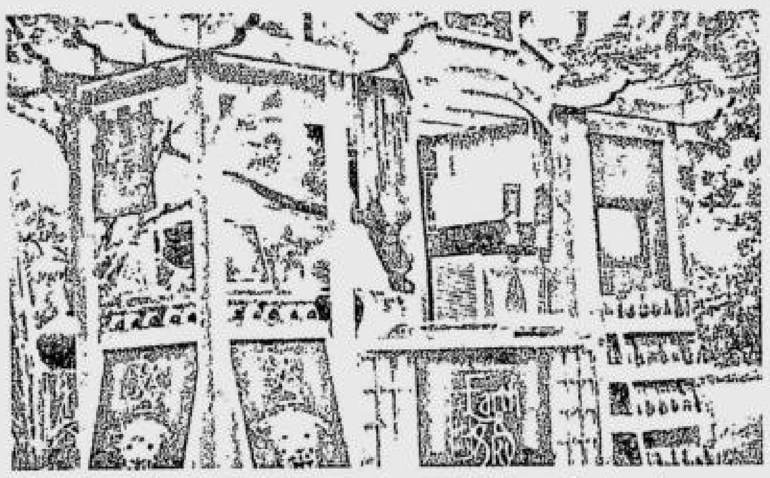


PEKING GARDEN offers Premium Holiday Set Menu for 12 persons. It includes four kinds of appetizers, Shark's Fin with fish lip and golden mushroom soup, Peking Duck, Baked Prawns in pastry shell with cheese and butter sauce, Crispy Rice Fish Fillet with fruit cocktails and mayonnaise, Braised Sliced Abalones with Vegetables, Deep-fried Peppercorn Crabs, Steamed Supreme Soup and Pork Dumplings, and desserts for P13,300+. Peking Garden is open on Christmas Day for dinner and lunch, and dinner on New Year's Day. Call 8179066 and 8179067.



HAPPY TASTE OF JAPAN
Sachi at the Coliseum Food Circle in Araneta Center offers this Tenderloin Steak set and other authentic Japanese dishes at reasonable prices. Its menu is topped off by Wagyu Kobe Beef, Hare-Hare Salad, Teva Gyoza and Yakiniku, among other Japanese specialties.

CRUSTASIA Asian Crab and Seafood House offers Pan-fried Catfish in Green Curry Sauce and Pineapple Fried Rice. Crustasia at The Podium offers the Emperors Grand Buffet Friday-Sunday which includes seafood and crab dishes. A la carte dishes include King Dao Spareribs, Scallop and Beancurd Hot Pot, Pan-fried Catfish with Green Curry Sauce, Stir-fried Beef, Thai Papaya Salad, among others. Visit Rockwell Power Plant Mall. Call 7285463 or 6313857.



SAMPLING booth where one can get a quick dose of relaxation with just a glass of Earth & Sky Iced Tea

Serenity in a glass

FEELING STRESSED AND ALL worked up? Sit back and relax with a tall glass of Earth & Sky Lemon or Green Iced Tea. Or drop by one of the Earth & Sky sampling booths at your favorite malls and supermarkets and experience what it is to be truly refreshed.

Restful bamboo flute music play all day. A tea leaves reader peeks into your future. For a minimum purchase, you can also have your name turned into a work of art by a Chinese calligrapher. There are tai chi and yoga demonstrations as well. With purchase of Earth & Sky, you also get a chance to win an aromatherapy burner and fortune cookie.

Earth & Sky Lemon Iced Tea is made with natural ingredients, and contains 100 percent of the recommended daily allowance (RDA) of Vitamin C. Since it is extracted from the finest tea leaves, the taste is just what tea should taste—not too sweet, too sour or bitter—just right for your taste buds. It also comes with the healthful antioxidants that tea leaves are known to have.

Health conscious? Earth & Sky Green Iced Tea is made from Nature's finest bounty—natural green tea. Now you can enjoy all the health benefits that come with drinking green tea such as antioxidants which help protect the body from free radicals which may accelerate aging and pose an increased risk to developing major diseases. So green tea doesn't only promote good health; it helps make you look younger!

TRY your hand at tai chi and learn how to harmonize mind and body.

Earth & Sky Lemon Iced Tea is available in 250-g, 500-g and 1-kg packs while Earth & Sky Green Iced Tea comes in 500-g packs at leading supermarkets, groceries, convenience stores and restaurants. Both varieties come in low-calorie versions in 45-g packs.

Lucky pair

FOR SEN. FRANCIS PANGILINAN and his wife, megastar Sharon Cuneta, eating is their family's number one bonding activity.

"We even have a dining table in our bedroom so the kids eat with us," confesses Sharon.

It was thus a no-brainer for Lucky Me! to ask the couple to endorse their most popular and trusted noodle brand. Besides the popular taste that Sharon and Kiko already love, Lucky Me! is also high in Sangkap Pinoy health-giving micronutrients.

"As hands-on parents, we're very particular about the quality of food that we give to our kids and that was something we were concerned with Lucky Me! at first," says Kiko. "But after they explained that its overall nutritional value, we were excited about the new commercial."

The new Lucky Me! commercial marks the very first time that the senator plays leading man to his megastar wife, and it allows the couple to show a side of that the public hasn't seen before.

"I was especially excited for Kiko, because I wanted everyone to see his not so serious side," the megastar quips. "As seen in the commercial, he really loves karaoke and he's not as laid-back as most people think. Believe me when I say that he's a lot funnier in person."

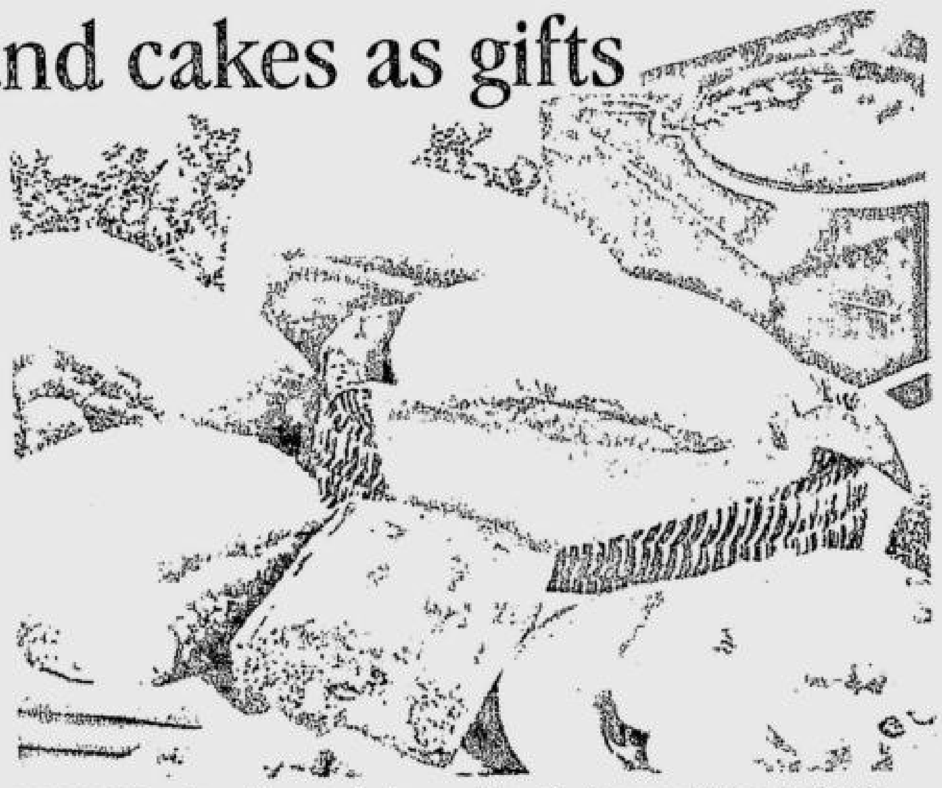
Who would have thought that for Sharon and Kiko Pangilinan, love, laughter and from time to time, a plate of Lucky Me! Pancit Canton is all it takes to keep their marriage going strong.

TEN years married and still going strong: Sen. Kiko Pangilinan and Sharon Cuneta are new endorsers of Lucky Me! Pancit Canton

Breads and cakes as gifts

ITALIANNI'S RESTAURANT offers freshly baked holiday breads and imported cakes for gift-giving this season.

The Two Fresh Bread Package lets you choose any two combination for only P330. A box of Tea Ring Bread spiced up with Mixed Fruits and Almond is available for P215. In addition to the Panna Cotta, Italianni's also has cakes imported from the United States, such as the seven-pound New York Cheesecake Colossal, Chocolate Bombe ("Tartufo"), Strawberry Daiquiri Cheesecake, Turtle Cheesecake and the three-layered sponge cake, Tiramisu. Call or visit any Italianni's branch and check out its holiday breads and imported desserts.



HOLIDAY breads and imported cakes great for gift-giving, available at Italianni's

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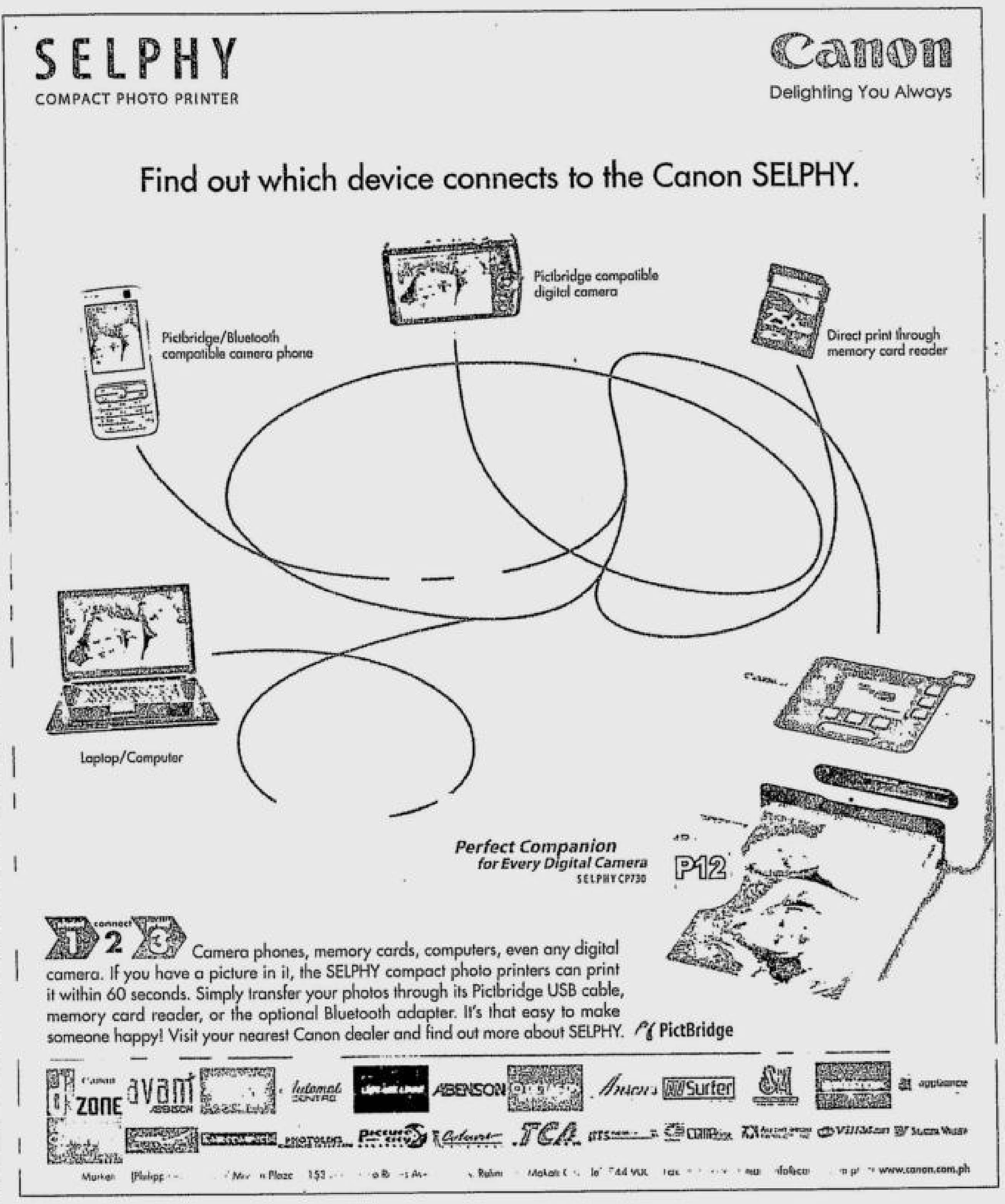

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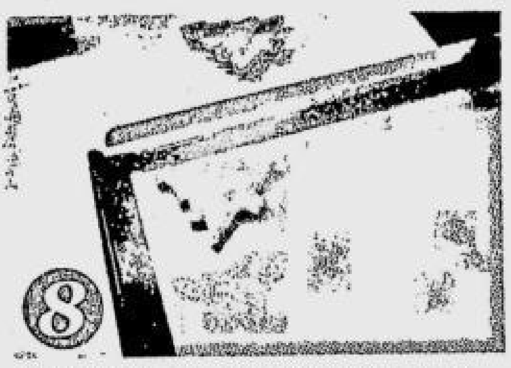
372-3825 to 44 loc. 4256 / 4258
Monday to Saturday, 8:00 am - 5:00 pm

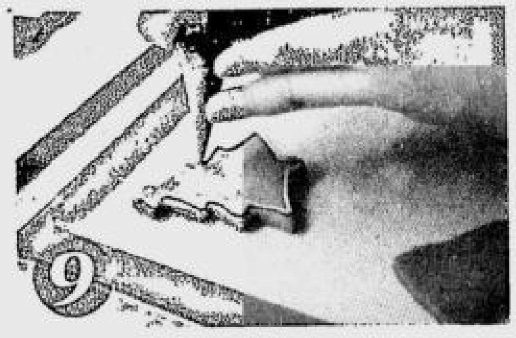
Fun Christmas baking

From page C1

USING cookie cutters, cut out desired shapes.



TRANSFER cookies to a tray with greased baking sheet. Bake for 20-30 minutes.



ALLOW cookies to cool then decorate.

gingerbread recipe, this one is the simplest way to get started.

You can add more ginger and cinnamon for spicier cookies, more sugar for sweeter cookies, or more butter or shortening for moister cookies.

"These cookies are also great as Christmas gifts to friends. Just put them in a nice gift box or jar," says Koa whose newest French Baker store—the 30th—is at the Mall of Asia. "Or, they can be ornaments to your tree or part of your table centerpiece."

You can also string gingerbread cookies to make a garland or wreath.

After baking, the gingerbread hardens when air-dried. Make a hole at the top of each shape if you want to put a string or ribbons.

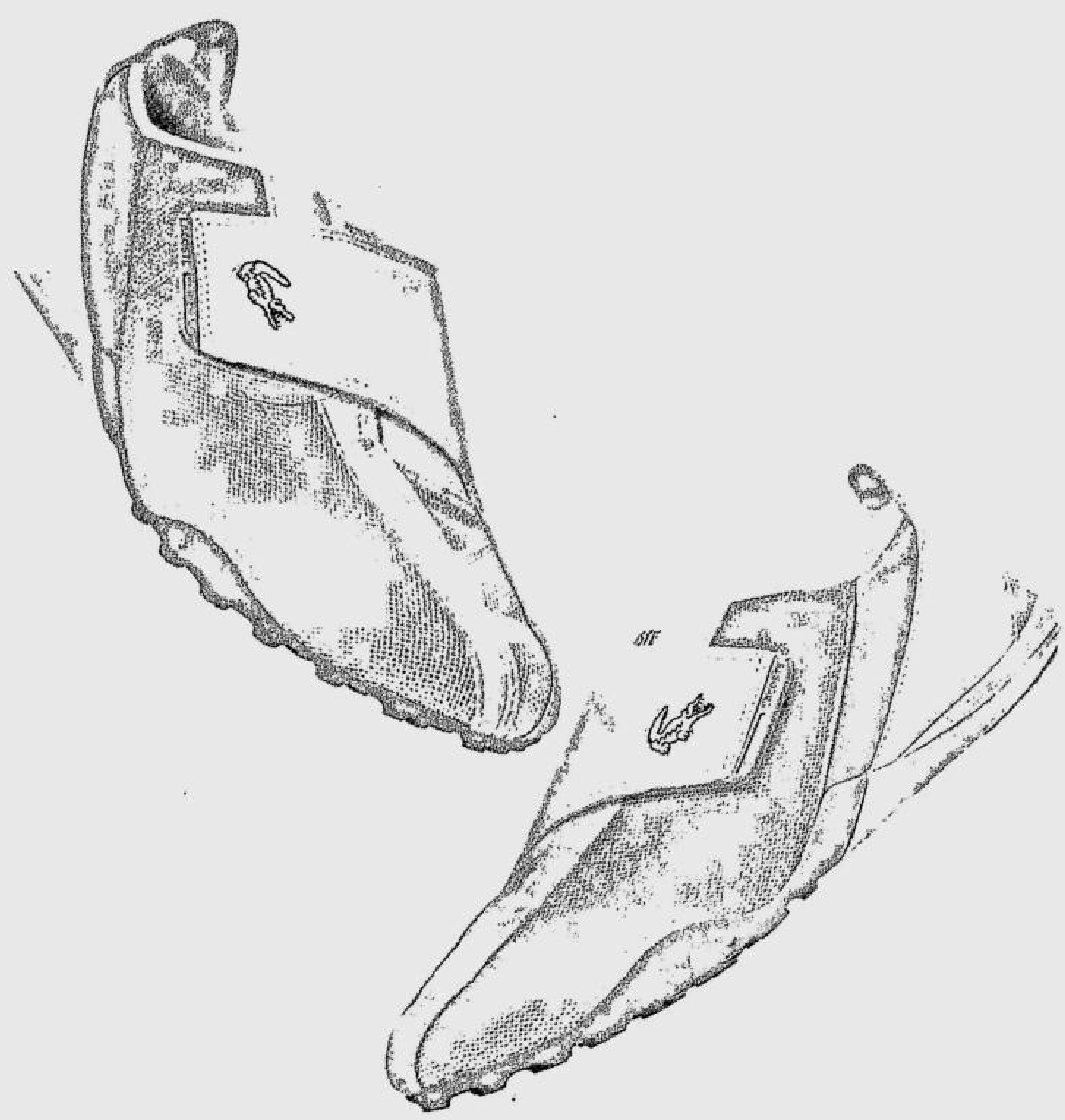
Koa uses holiday cookie cutters in the shapes of gingerbread man, candy canes, Christmas tree or socks.

With this recipe, the number of cookies you actually get will depend upon the size of the cutters.

Ingredients:
469 g all-purpose flour
4 g baking soda
3 g salt
13 g cinnamon powder
13 g ground ginger
174 g confectionery sugar
197 g unsalted butter
89 g maple syrup
50g egg yolk
Royal icing:
18 g egg whites
100 g powder sugar
A few drops of red, yellow or green food coloring

For suggestions, e-mail vbaga@inquirer.com.ph

GINGERBREAD cookies



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Have a Spanish party

IF YOU WANT something different for your Christmas party, get The Casa Armas Catering Solutions to help you.

The catering arm of Casa Armas Tapas Bar y Restaurante will bring the taste of Spain to the home or any place.

It offers over 100 dishes like the Cochinillo, Than Long Crabs and roast chicken; different *paellas, tapas, chorizos*, and other delicacies. Sangria, wines and cheese are also available.

Casa Armas Catering Solutions offers five packages.

Menu A costs P495+ per head; Menu B, P595+ per head; Menu C, P625+ per head; Menu D, P725+ per head; and Menu E, P895+ per head.

Call or visit Casa Armas The Podium (G/F The Podium, ADB Avenue, Ortigas Center, Mandaluyong City, tel. 6873663, 6873370); Casa Armas Greenbelt (3/F Greenbelt 3, Ayala Malls, 7574996, 7574961); and Casa Armas Makati (132 Jupiter St., Makati City, 8973542, 8973605).

Choir 'goes' caroling

THE MANILA CHAMBER Choir (MCC) will sing Christmas carols every weekend until Dec. 24 at the lobby of the Crowne Plaza Galleria Manila.

Organized in 1996, the group performs a wide repertoire of classical, folk and contemporary/secular choral pieces.

The MCC has successfully toured Europe, Asia and the United States and won in top international choral competitions.

The MCC has performed in special events, command performances, social functions.

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KITCHEN RESCUE
Reggie Aspiras

Kitchen icons are windows to the divine

ICONS ARE TRADITIONAL PRESENTS for Christmas and New Year. It is Greek Orthodox practice to hang kitchen icons on New Year's Eve to signify that the place is dedicated to God and hence, all activities therein are blessed.

Fr. Dennis Paez of Don Basco Tabor House says "icons are windows to the divine, thus the common square ones that depict the parting of the clouds, a window for us mortals to interact with the divine. The images are humble and not self-absorbed. When you look at an icon, it almost always looks back at you."

Wanting to help nine young men who, for economic reasons, had stopped their schooling, Fr. Dennis started Project Icon. Still in its infancy, the project is his answer to donation fatigue.

Proceeds from the sale of the icons provide scholarships for the boys who also acquire discipline vital to their future through working on the tedious art of iconography.

Fortunately, hard work has paid off. The icons have all been snatched off as soon as they left the oven and Fr. Dennis could only hope that this continues to help more people.

Like a true Salesian, he marches on for a cause, icons in tow, hoping that these beautiful pieces of art and what they stand for, continue to bring a brighter future for those who make them, happiness to those who give them and blessings in abundance to those who receive them.

For orders, call 0917-8312570.

Chinese ham

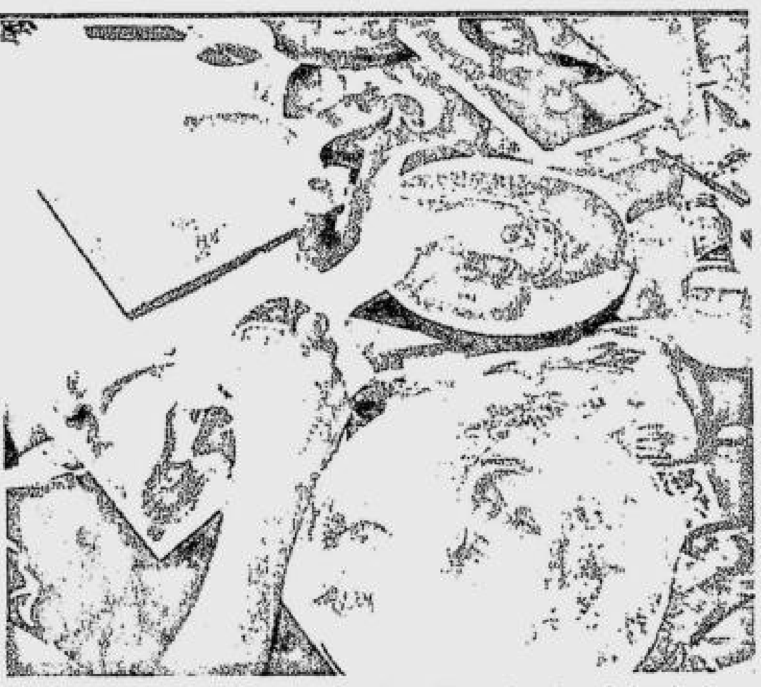
I bought Chinese ham a year ago (Excelente, Echague, Quiapo). I want to serve it for the holidays. Please give me advise and cooking instructions on how to make the ham look and taste as new. Please include the recipe for syrup for glazing.

ABRAHAM ASUNCION

Here are some of my best ham recipes for the season. Promise, if you follow all these steps, your *jamon* will taste only six months old! Kidding! *Maligayang Pasko po*!

For salty hams such as Chinese ham: Soak overnight in pineapple juice. Make sure it is

KITCHEN/ D3



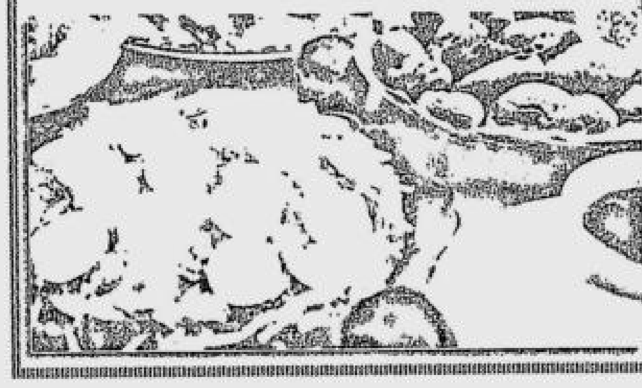
"SANGKALAN" kitchen chopping board icons handmade by the boys of Don Basco Tabor House make nice Christmas gifts

Take a Christmas break! Leave the cooking to Lucky 21

When was the last time you enjoyed the holidays? Not if you're busy preparing gifts, holiday meals and attending the season's never-ending socials.

Luckily, *Lucky 21 Food Products* understands the need for you to take a break. And they've done so by offering a ready Christmas menu you can simply serve, giving you more time to relax and partake of the season's love and cheer.

Planning a party for friends and family? Order Lucky 21's yummy Empanaditas. They're tasty, crunchy and bite-sized. For an even more unique treat, Lucky 21's Special Empanada come in a variety of delightful fillings including *Chicken, Tuna, Spicy Beef, Ham & Cheese, Pork Adobo, Asado, Menudo, Chorizo, and Chicken Pastel.*

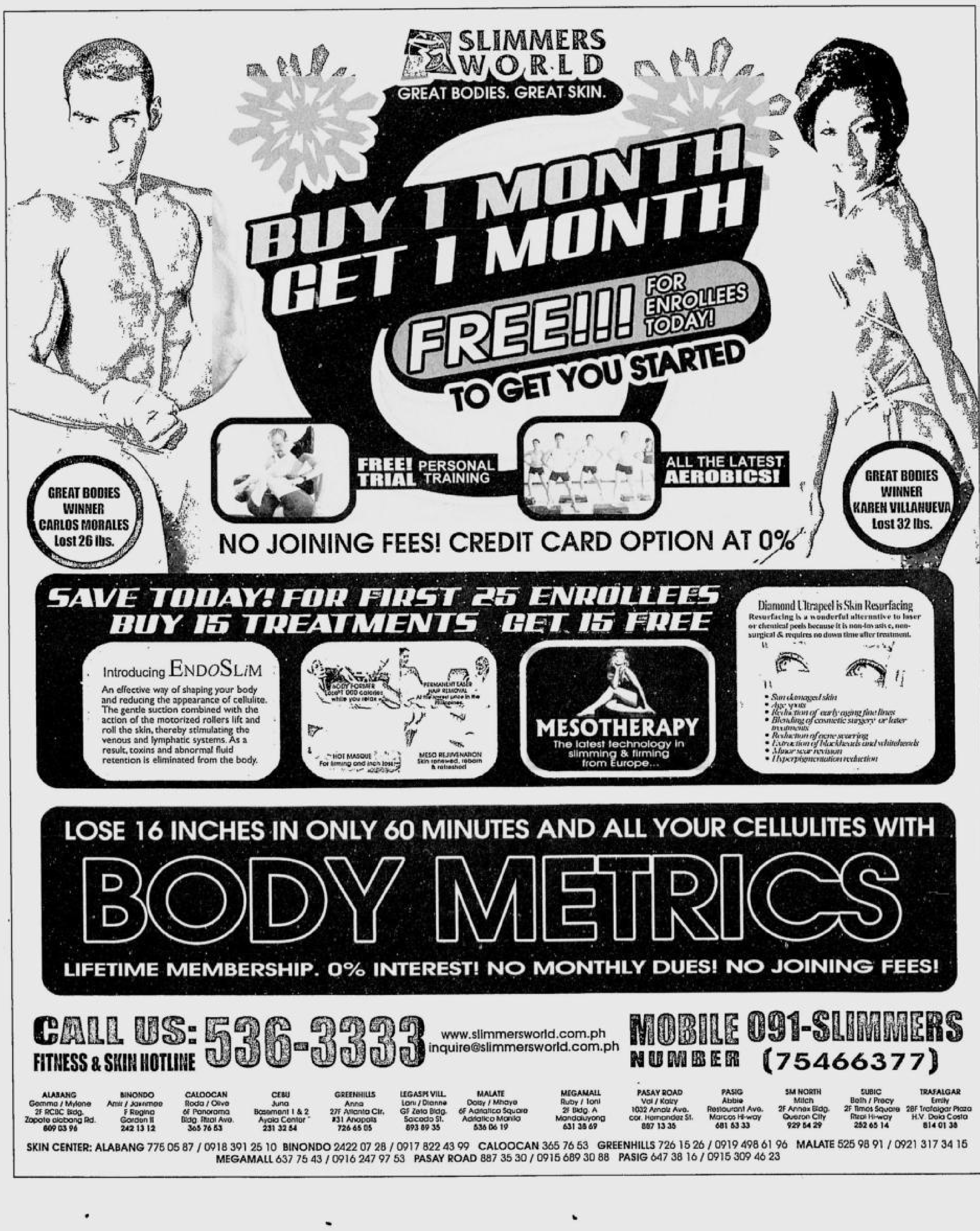


For the Noche Buena table, Lucky 21 offers a choice of noodle dishes to assure long and happy get-togethers: *Pancit Sotanghon, Pancit Malabon and Pancit Canton.* You can also serve Lucky 21's traditional favorites like Embutido, Siomai, and Lumpiang Ubod with what is said to be the best sauce in town.

Christmas won't be complete without sweets and Lucky 21 has the market cornered on heavenly desserts like Leche Flan, Halayang Ube, Brownies, Carrot Cupcake, Tarts and Puto.

So give yourself a break this Christmas. Leave the hassles of cooking to Lucky 21. You'll be glad you did.

Call Lucky 21 Food Products at 922-9605, 926-0142 and 410-7987. Or drop by their place at 21 K-3rd St., Kamuning, Quezon City.



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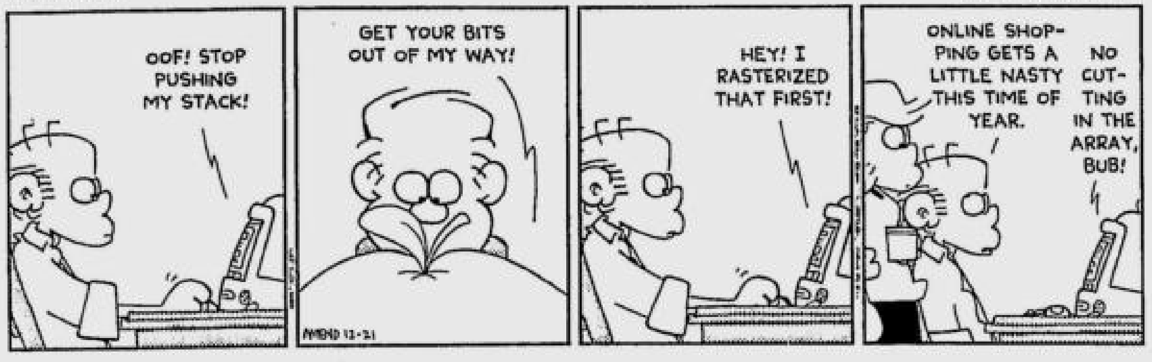
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 21, 2006

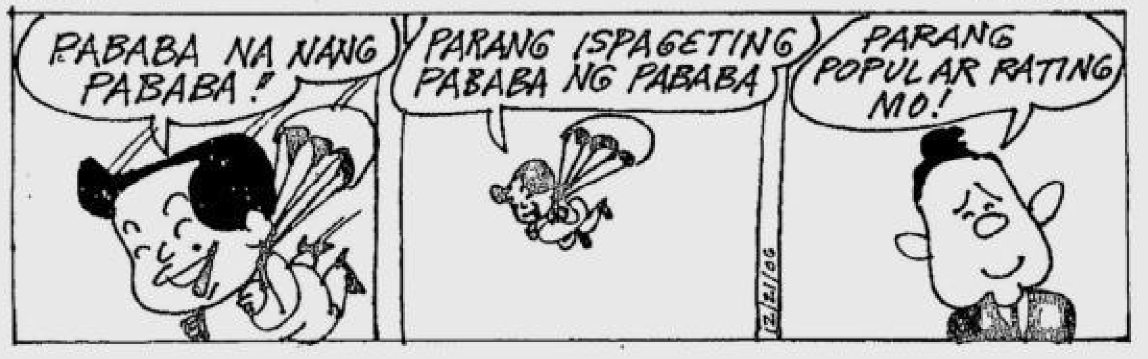
FOXTROT

BY BILL AMEND


OOF! STOP PUSHING MY STACK!
GET YOUR BITS OUT OF MY WAY!
HEY! I RASTERIZED THAT FIRST!
ONLINE SHOPPING GETS A LITTLE NASTY THIS TIME OF YEAR.
NO CUTTING IN THE ARRAY, BUB!
AMEND 12-21

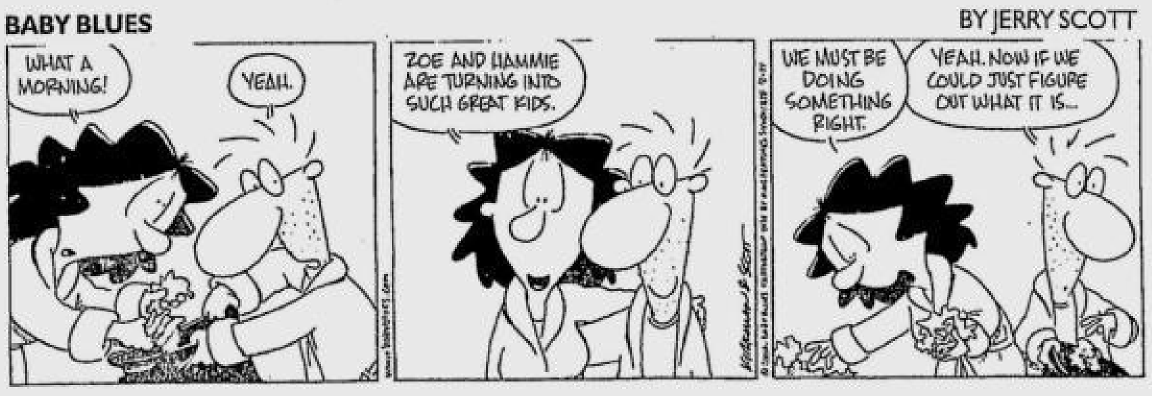
A. LIPIN

BY JESS ABRERA


PABABA NA NANG PABABA!
PARANG ISPAGETING PABABA NG PABABA
PARANG POPULAR RATING MO!
12/21/06

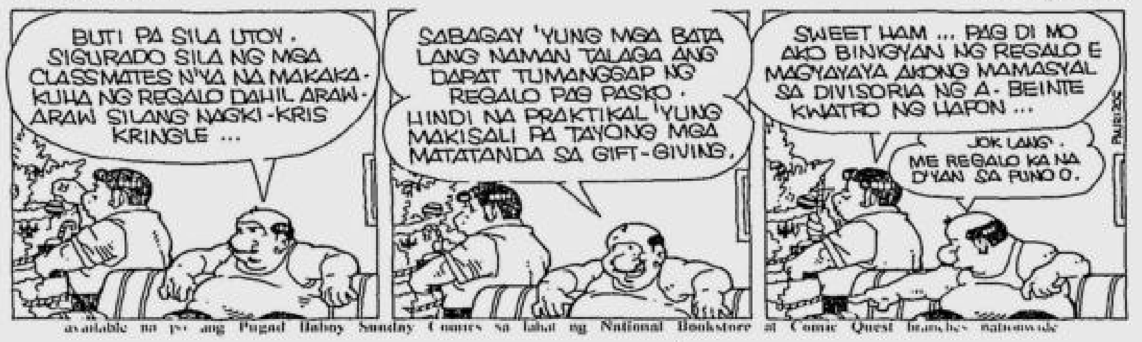
BABY BLUES

BY JERRY SCOTT


WHAT A MORNING!
YEAH.
ZOE AND HAMMIE ARE TURNING INTO SUCH GREAT KIDS.
WE MUST BE DOING SOMETHING RIGHT.
YEAH. NOW IF WE COULD JUST FIGURE OUT WHAT IT IS...

PUGAD BABOY

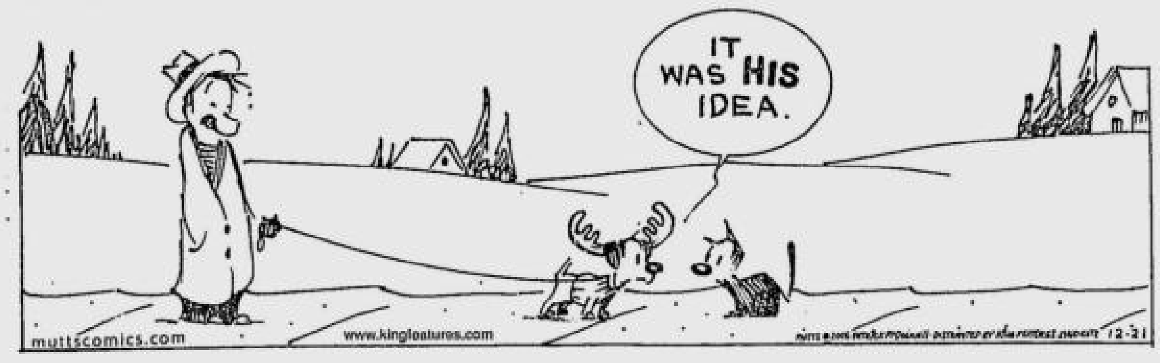
BY P.M. JUNIOR


BUTI PA SILA UTOY. SIGURADO SILA NG MGA CLASSMATES N'YA NA MAKAKAKUHA NG REGALO DAHIL ARAW-ARAW SILANG NAGKI-KRIS KRINGLE ...
SABAGAY 'YUNG MGA BATA LANG NAMAN TALAGA ANG DAPAT TUMANGGAP NG REGALO PAG PASKO. HINDI NA PRAKTIKAL 'YUNG MAKISALI PA TAYONG MGA MATATANDA SA GIFT-GIVING.
SWEET HAM ... PAG DI MO AKO BINIGYAN NG REGALO E MAGYAYAYA AKONG MAMASYAL SA DIVISORIA NG A. BEINTE KWATRO NG HAPON ...
JOK LANG. ME REGALO KA NA D'YAN SA PUNO O.

available na po ang Pugad Baboy Sunday Comics sa lahat ng National Bookstore at Comic Quest branches nationwide

MUTTS

BY PATRICK McDONNELL


IT WAS HIS IDEA.
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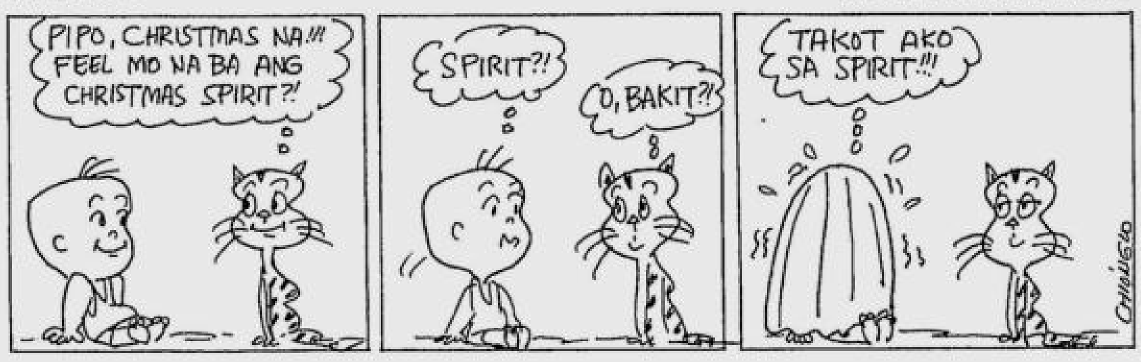
www.kingfeatures.com
12-21

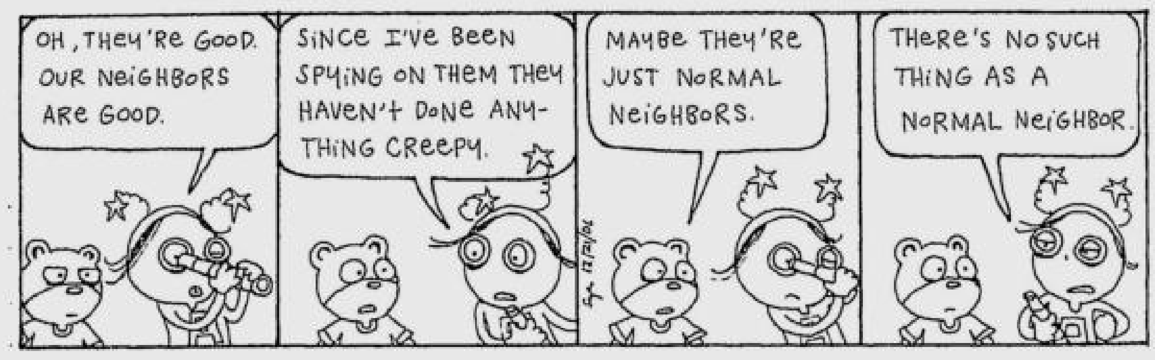
LOVEKNOTS

BY ELIZABETH CHIONGLO


PIPO, CHRISTMAS NA!!! FEEL MO NA BA ANG CHRISTMAS SPIRIT?!
SPIRIT?!
O, BAKIT?!
TAKOT AKO SA SPIRIT!!!
CHIONGLO

ATOMO AND WEBOY

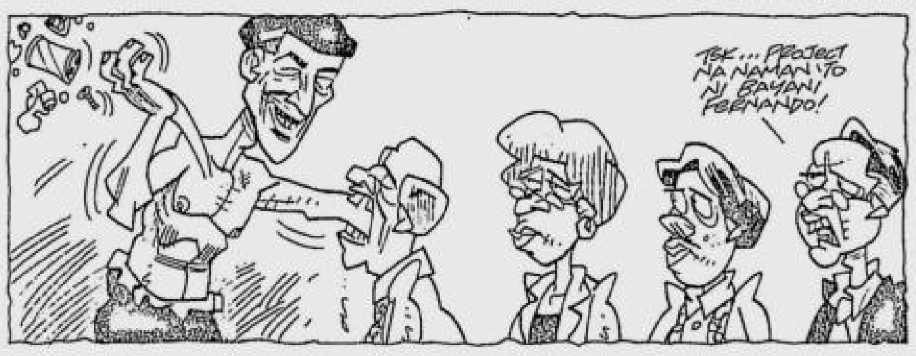
BY LYRA GARCELLANO


OH, THEY'RE GOOD. OUR NEIGHBORS ARE GOOD.
SINCE I'VE BEEN SPYING ON THEM THEY HAVEN'T DONE ANYTHING CREEPY.
MAYBE THEY'RE JUST NORMAL NEIGHBORS.
THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS A NORMAL NEIGHBOR.

DIVINE COMEDY

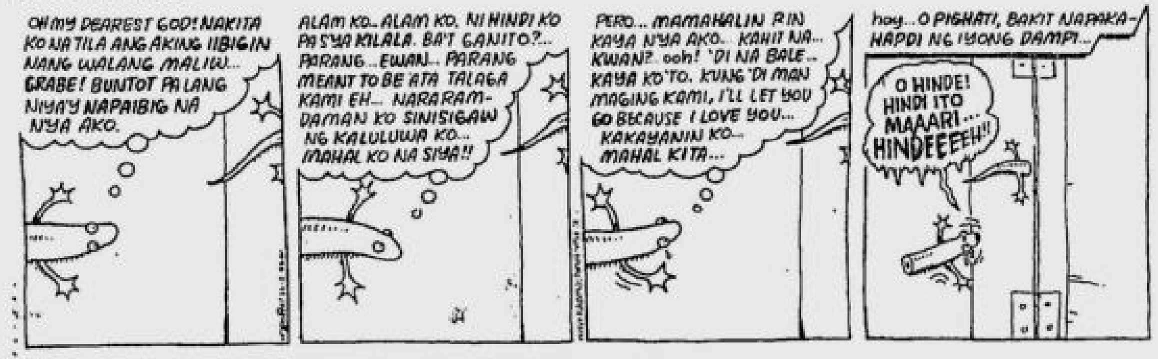
BY STEVEN PABALINAS

PUMUNTA SA PILIPINAS SI BAO XISHUN (ANG PINAKA-MATANGKAD NA TAO SA BUONG MUNDO AYON SA GUINNESS BOOK OF WORLD RECORDS) PARA DUKUTIN ANG BASURA SA LOOB NG MGA PULITIKO NATIN


TSK... PROJECT NA NAMAN 'TO NI BAYANI FERNANDO!

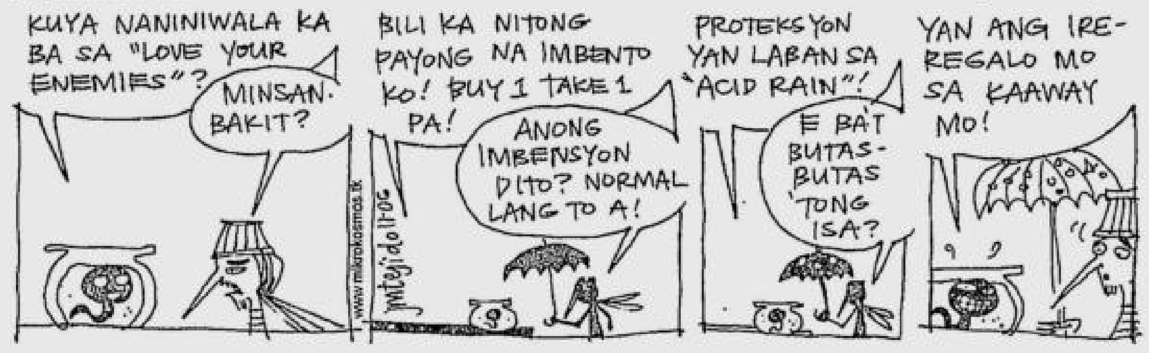
KIKO MACHINE

BY MANIX ABRERA


OH MY DEAREST GOD! NAKITA KO NA TILA ANG AKING IIBIGIN NANG WALANG MALIW... GRABE! BUNTOT PA LANG NIYA'Y NAPAIBIG NA NYA AKO.
ALAM KO... ALAM KO, NI HINDI KO PA SYA KILALA. BA'T GANITO?... PARANG... EWAN... PARANG MEANT TO BE ATA TALAGA KAMI EH... NARARAMDAMAN KO SINISIGAW NG KALULUWA KO... MAHAL KO NA SIYA!!
PERO... MAMAHALIN RIN KAYA NYA AKO... KAHIT NA... KWAN? ooh! 'DI NA BALE... KAYA KO 'TO. KUNG 'DI MAN MAGING KAMI, I'LL LET YOU GO BECAUSE I LOVE YOU... KAKAYANIN KO... MAHAL KITA...
hoy... O PIGHATI, BAKIT NAPAKAHAPDI NG IYONG DAMPI...
O HINDE! HINDI ITO MAAARI... HINDEEEEH!!

MIKROKOSMOS

BY JOMIKE TEJIDO


KUYA NANINIWALA KA BA SA "LOVE YOUR ENEMIES"?
MINSAN. BAKIT?
BILI KA NITONG PAYONG NA IMBENTO KO! BUY 1 TAKE 1 PA!
ANONG IMBENSYON DITO? NORMAL LANG TO A!
PROTEKSYON YAN LABAN SA "ACID RAIN"!
E BAT BUTAS-BUTAS 'TONG ISA?
YAN ANG IREREGALO MO SA KAAWAY MO!
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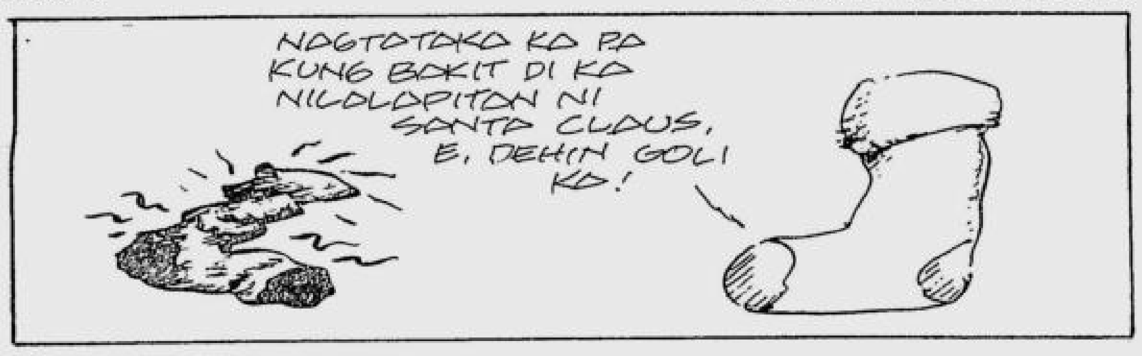
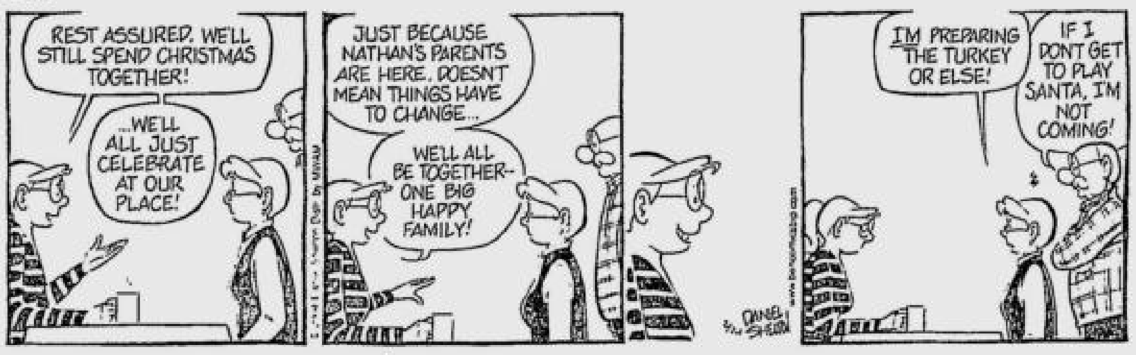
TULDOK

BY PAPU AND TATUM MILAMBILING


NAGTATAKA KA PA KUNG BAKIT DI KA NILALAPITAN NI SANTA CLAUS, E, DEHIN GOLI KA!

BEN

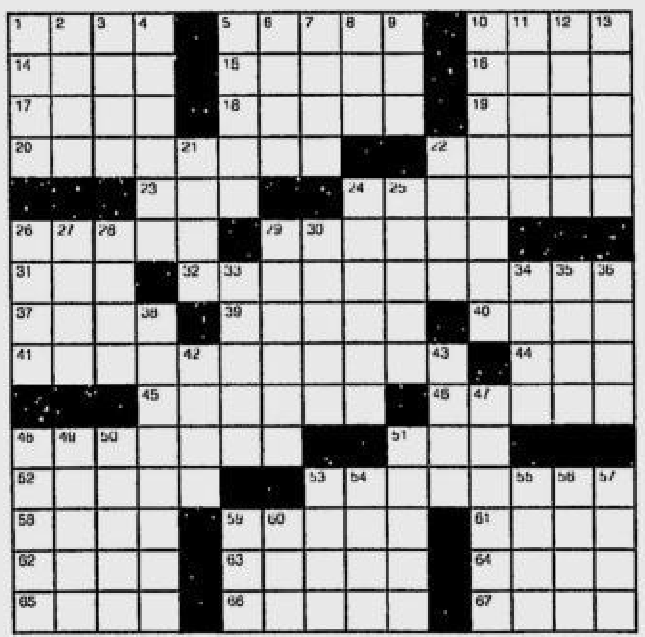
BY DANIEL SHELTON


REST ASSURED. WE'LL STILL SPEND CHRISTMAS TOGETHER!
...WE'LL ALL JUST CELEBRATE AT OUR PLACE!
JUST BECAUSE NATHAN'S PARENTS ARE HERE, DOESN'T MEAN THINGS HAVE TO CHANGE...
WE'LL ALL BE TOGETHER--ONE BIG HAPPY FAMILY!
I'M PREPARING THE TURKEY OR ELSE!
IF I DON'T GET TO PLAY SANTA, I'M NOT COMING!
DANIEL SHELTON

DAILY CROSSWORD

ACROSS
1 Hacks
5 Final Greek letter
10 Pro __ (in proportion)
14 Big pot of stew
15 Bricklayer
16 Guitarist Clapton
17 Handle roughly
18 School paper
19 Swerve
20 Start of Evan Esar quip
22 Bottled spirit?
23 Switch positions
24 Damascus populace
26 Honor the flag
29 Sell to the public
31 Fall behind
32 Part 2 of quip
37 High cards
39 Lenya or Lehmann
40 "Lohengrin" heroine
41 Part 3 of quip
44 "__ Abner"
45 Edible mushrooms
46 Expunge
48 Crusader's foe
51 Understand
52 Office worker
53 End of quip
58 Helpful information
59 Like some stadiums
61 Organic compound
62 Dry ravine in Africa
63 Singer Baker
64 Comic Chris
65 NCAA part
66 Sacred song sung a capella
67 Seth's son

DOWN
1 Crooner Perry
2 Bates or King
3 Sad
4 Oater bar
5 Foretokens
6 Male: abbr.
7 Latin being
8 Tibetan gazelle
9 Random choice
10 Wake-up call
11 Type of stage
12 Connect
13 Parcels of suburbia
21 Computer's fix-it button
22 Clasp
24 Word before quo
25 Chinese official's office
26 Sandwich side
27 Fast food pick
28 Maturing agent
29 Get back into business
30 Praise highly
33 Blaze of light
34 Songstress Fitzgerald
35 Sister of Osiris
36 Mall happening
38 Fr. half of a West Indies island
42 Pawn
43 Act
47 Adore
48 Neutral vowel sound
49 Wanted poster word
50 Splits apart
51 Anwar of Egypt
53 Leave out
54 Gala
55 Privy to
56 Ms. Chanel
57 Benevolent society
59 Lake maker
60 Lennon's widow



By Alan P. Olschwang
Huntington Beach, CA

12/21/06

Wednesday's Puzzle Solved

S	A	L	A	■	F	A	R	A	D	■	F	A	I	L
T	R	I	B	■	A	M	O	R	E	■	I	D	L	E
A	G	E	S	■	C	A	R	O	M	■	N	A	S	A
G	O	S	O	U	T	H	Y	O	U	N	G	M	A	N
■	■	■	R	L	S	■	■	■	R	A	E	■	■	■
S	H	E	B	A	■	T	A	S	■	I	R	A	N	I
T	A	R	■	N	O	R	T	H	O	F	E	D	E	N
E	R	A	S	■	C	A	R	I	B	■	D	E	W	S
W	E	S	T	P	A	C	I	F	I	C	■	L	E	E
S	M	E	A	R	■	T	A	T	■	O	P	A	R	T
■	■	■	R	O	M	■	■	■	A	I	R	■	■	■
E	A	S	T	D	A	L	L	A	S	F	O	R	T	Y
G	I	L	L	■	T	A	I	N	T	■	P	A	R	E
A	D	U	E	■	T	O	N	T	O	■	E	C	O	N
N	E	R	D	■	E	S	T	E	R	■	L	E	N	S

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12/21/06

HOROSCOPE

YOU BORN TODAY: You're very physical in your approach to life. You're intense, strong-willed and determined. Your communication skills (particularly your use of silence) are dramatic and effective. You're private about your personal life. You have a strong love for animals and small children. The year ahead is social and fun-loving, and will particularly favor partnerships.

Birthdate of: Kiefer Sutherland, actor; Samuel L. Jackson, actor; Jane Kaczmarek, actress.

ARIES (March 21 to April 19): Don't jump to conclusions about matters related to religion and politics. You're ready to jump on your soapbox and defend your opinions. Count to three before you begin. Don't be rash.

TAURUS (April 20 to May 20): You want to be free of obligations or financial responsibilities to others. Don't do anything reckless today—and don't quit your day job.

GEMINI (May 21 to June 20): You definitely want to be free of all restraints or restrictions in your one-on-one relationships. Freedom is your goal today. (That's your story, and you're sticking to it.)

CANCER (June 21 to July 22): You feel extremely independent at work today. You don't want anyone telling you what to do. If anyone looks at you the wrong way, you're tempted to scream and walk out. (Don't do it.)

LEO (July 23 to Aug. 22): You're not sure why, but you feel rebellious today. You want the freedom to do your own thing. Unfortunately, you can only push this so far. (Be careful.)

VIRGO (Aug. 23 to Sept. 22): This is an accident-prone day at home today. Slow down and take it easy. Guard against breakage and thoughtless comments to family members. Remember: Family is forever.

LIBRA (Sept. 23 to Oct. 22): This is definitely an accident-prone day. Be careful when driving or walking, and even when talking. Think twice before you speak. (Oh, yeah.)

SCORPIO (Oct. 23 to Nov. 21): This is the dicey day with money. You might find some; you might lose some. Impulse shopping can really grab you by the throat. ("The devil made me do it!")

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22 to Dec. 21): Be careful! You feel restless and impulsive today. You'll have a knee-jerk reaction to everything. Unfortunately, this is a slightly accident-prone situation. Have patience.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22 to Jan. 19): Don't wait until things are absolutely unbearable before you try to make improvements. A stitch in time saves nine. (But who better than you knows this?)

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20 to Feb. 18): You might react strongly to a friend or a group today. Perhaps you feel challenged? Something probably rubs you the wrong way and makes you want to respond. Caution: Think before you speak.

PISCES (Feb. 19 to March 20): Authority figures, parents and bosses will rub you the wrong way today. This simply makes you want to revolt. The problem is that you're quick to interpret things as a slam against you. (This might not be the case.)

CONCEPTIS SU DOKU

Conceptis Sudoku by Dave Green

		7	5		8	2		
				4				
6				1				9
7								6
	4	9				8	2	
8								5
1				6				7
				2				
		8	3		9	4		

Difficulty Level ★★★

12/21

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HOW TO PLAY SU DOKU

Fill the grid so that every column, every row and every 3x3 box contains the digits 1 to 9.
Tips and program at www.sudoku.com

Answer to previous puzzle

3	4	6	9	2	8	7	1	5
9	2	1	5	7	6	4	3	8
7	5	8	4	1	3	2	6	9
2	6	3	1	9	4	5	8	7
8	1	4	7	3	5	6	9	2
5	9	7	8	6	2	3	4	1
1	3	9	6	5	7	8	2	4
6	8	5	2	4	1	9	7	3
4	7	2	3	8	9	1	5	6

Difficulty Level ★★★

Yuletide confections

WHIP UP SOME CHOCOLATE-Y treats for Noche Buena. Try these recipes courtesy of Hershey's.

Christmas Kisses Candies

About 14 Hershey's Kisses Milk Chocolates
¾ c ground almonds
1/3 c powdered sugar
1 tbsp light corn syrup
½ tsp almond extract
Few drops green food color
Few drops red food color
Granulated sugar

Remove wrappers from chocolate pieces. Stir together ground almonds and powdered sugar in medium bowl until well combined.

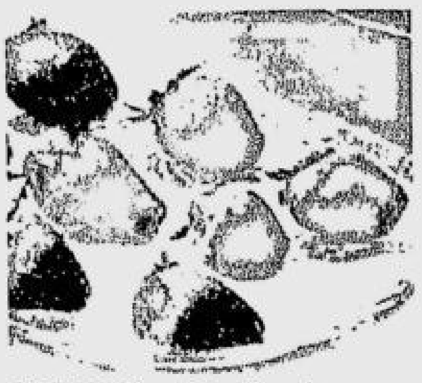
Stir together corn syrup and almond extract; pour over almond mixture, stirring until completely blended.

Divide mixture in half, placing each half in separate bowls.

Add green food color to one part; with clean hands, mix until color is well blended and mixture clings together. Add red food color to other half; mix as directed.

Shape at least 1 tsp almond mixture around each chocolate piece. Roll in granulated sugar. Store in airtight container in cool, dry place.

Makes about 14 candies.


CREAMY Chocolate-dipped Strawberries

Creamy Chocolate-dipped Strawberries

1½ c Hershey's Semi-Sweet Chocolate Chips
1 tbsp shortening (do not use butter, margarine, spread or oil)
Fresh strawberries, rinsed and patted dry

Cover tray with wax paper.

Place chocolate chips and shortening in medium microwave-safe bowl. Microwave at high (100 percent) for one minute, stir.

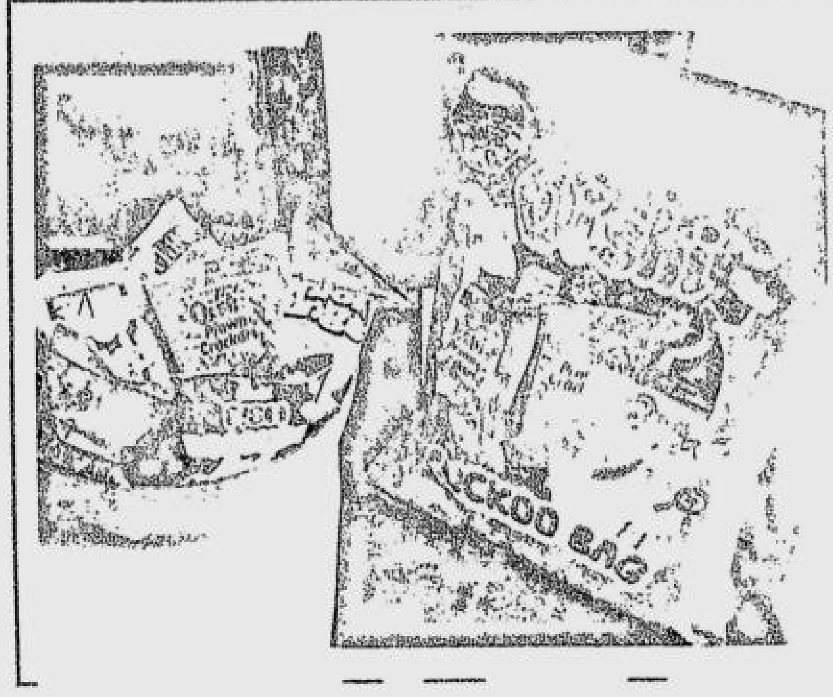
If necessary, microwave at high for an additional 15 seconds at a time, stirring after each heating, just until chips are melted when stirred.

Holding strawberry at top, dip bottom two-thirds of each berry into melted mixture; shake gently to remove excess. Place on prepared tray.

Refrigerate about 1 hour or until coating is firm. Cover; refrigerate leftover dipped berries. For best results, use within 24 hours.

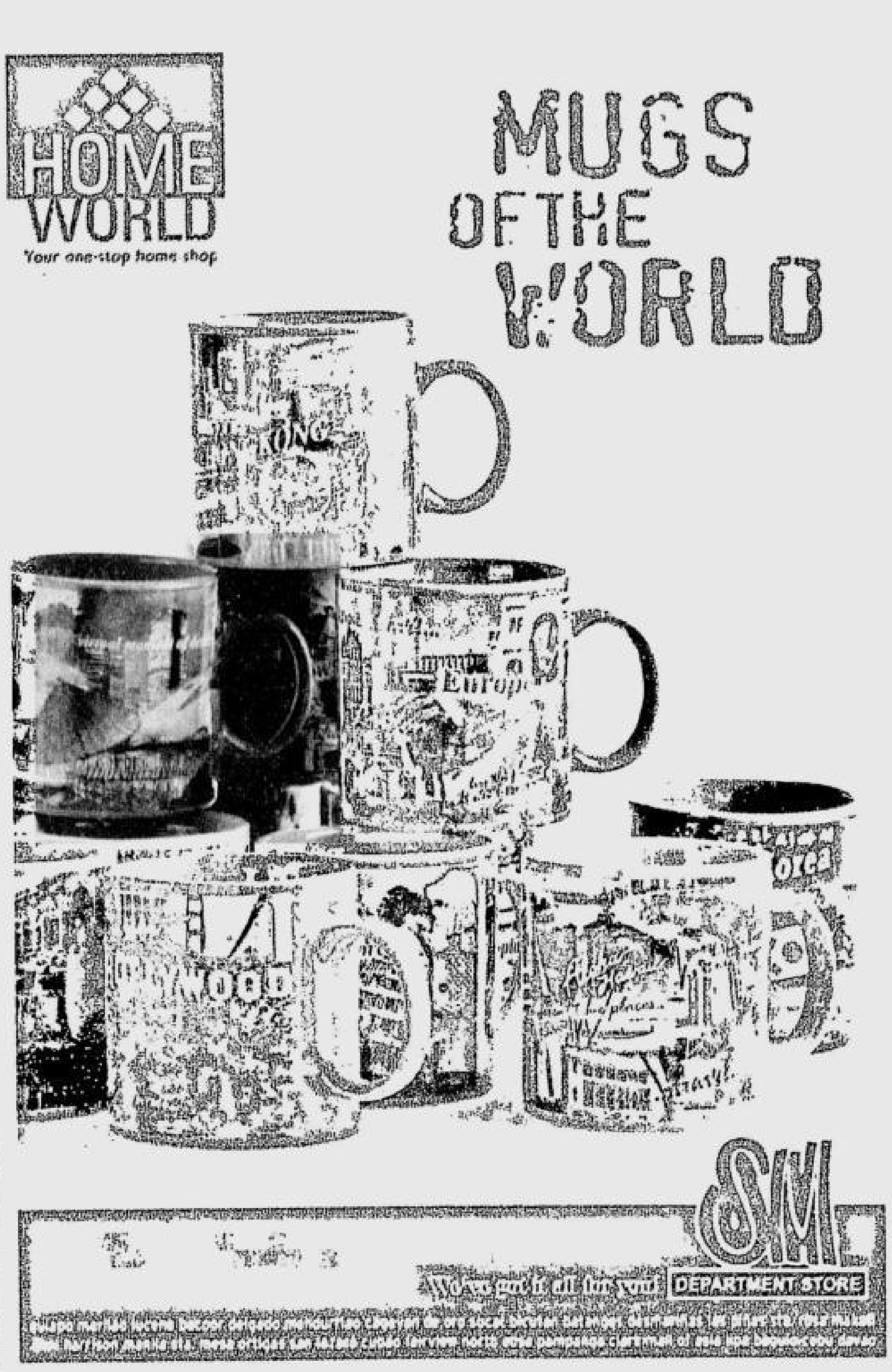
Makes about three dozen dipped berries (¾ c coating).

Conventional directions: Cover tray with wax paper. Melt chocolate chips and shortening in top of double boiler over hot, not boiling, water; stir until smooth. Remove from heat. Prepare, dip and store berries as directed above.



GOING CUCKOO THIS CHRISTMAS

Enjoy the Christmas celebrations with the Oishi Christmas Cuckoo bag, the perfect gift to give or receive this season. Each bag contains various tasty Oishi snacks, such as the Cheese Clubs, Black Pepper Prawn Crackers, Onion Rings, Oheya Multi-Grain Snacks, Sun Tea Instant Iced Tea Mix, Potato Crisps, a 2007 pocket calendar and a surprise gift from Oishi. Every Oishi Christmas Cuckoo Bag not only brings fun to the recipient but also a P1 contribution to Operation Smile Philippines, which gives children born with hare lip and cleft palate conditions the surgical assistance they need. The Oishi Cuckoo Bag is available at all leading supermarkets nationwide.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Kitchen icons . . .

From page D1

submerged in juice. This will lessen the saltiness and make it tender. If using honey hams, omit this step.

1 ham, scored
Whole cloves
All spice, 1 tsp for every kilo
Vegetable oil

Prick scored diamonds with cloves. Brush with vegetable oil. Rub fat side with all spice.

Bake for one hour covered with foil at 350°F. Remove foil.

Brush with glaze. Repeat glazing every 15 minutes. Do this three times.

Glaze:
1/3 c honey
1/3 c pineapple juice, *marsala* wine, port wine, sherry wine or rum

Mix and brush on to ham. After the glazing process, make sugar crust.

Sugar crust:
Brown sugar
Dijon Mustard

Brush ham with a generous coat of mustard. Press brown sugar on mustard-coated ham to form a thick sugar crust. Top side only.

Bake another 15-20 minutes or until sugar had melted and a crust had formed.

Serve with pan-roasted apples, grilled pineapples, mustard, horseradish, bread and your choice of sauces.

Choose from any of the sauces below. The procedure for all is: Combine all the ingredients with pan drippings from the ham in a saucepan and simmer until thick. Season to taste. If using Chinese ham, do not add pan drippings to the sauce. It might be too salty.

Raisin: 2 tbsp each—butter, oil, honey, mustard; ¼ c sugar; 2 tsp fresh ginger, grated; 3 tbsp vinegar; 2 tsp soy sauce; ¼ c raisins.

Pineapple: 1 c each—brown sugar and crushed pineapple, with juice; 2 tbsp mustard; ¼ tsp cinnamon; 2 tsp vinegar; ¼ c honey.

Sarsi: 1 c Sarsi, ¼ c each—Dijon mustard and maple syrup; 2 tsp vinegar; 1/3 c sugar; 1 clove

CHEF Jon-jon Tiozon and his Christmas bread

Pine maple: ¼ c each pineapple juice, ketchup, sugar; 1 c maple syrup; ½ c pineapple chunks, chopped; 2 tbsp soy sauce; 2 tsp vinegar; 2 tsp tomato paste.

Roasted apples:
3 tbsp butter
3 tbsp brown sugar
¼ tsp cinnamon
4 apples, wedged

Melt butter, add brown sugar. Add apples and cook until golden.

Pineapples:

Slice pineapples and grill on hot grill plate.

Christmas bread

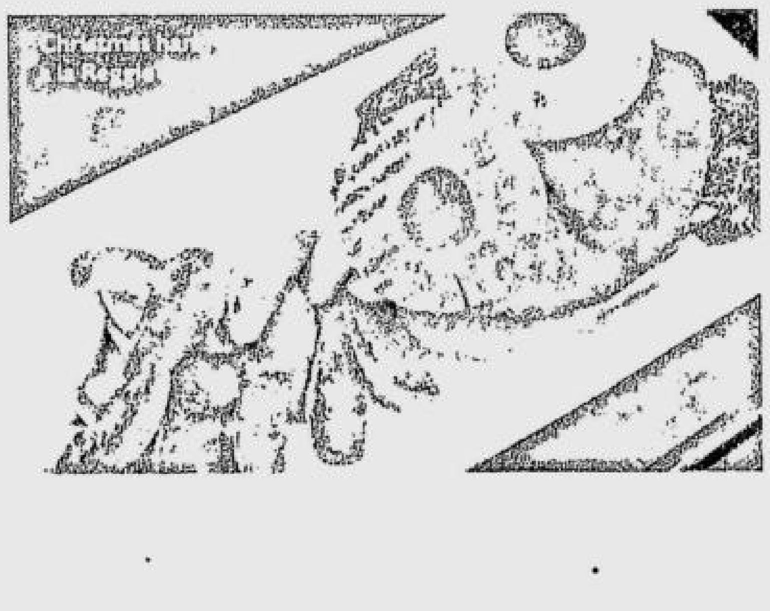
Pastry chef Jon-Jon Tiozon has an elegant take on the beloved cheese-pimiento sandwich. The bread alone tastes like cheese pimiento minus the *palaman*. It will go so well with your ham or may even be eaten alone.

It's an original by chef Jon-jon who is part of the Inyo group, a bunch of young guys and a lady, all packed with pure talent... But that's next week's story.

For now, I just have to let you know that this yummy Christmas bread could be ordered so, like my family, yours could enjoy it for Noche Buena. Call 4260301.

A very merry Christmas to all! Enjoy every bite!

E-mail the author at raspiras @inquirer.com.ph



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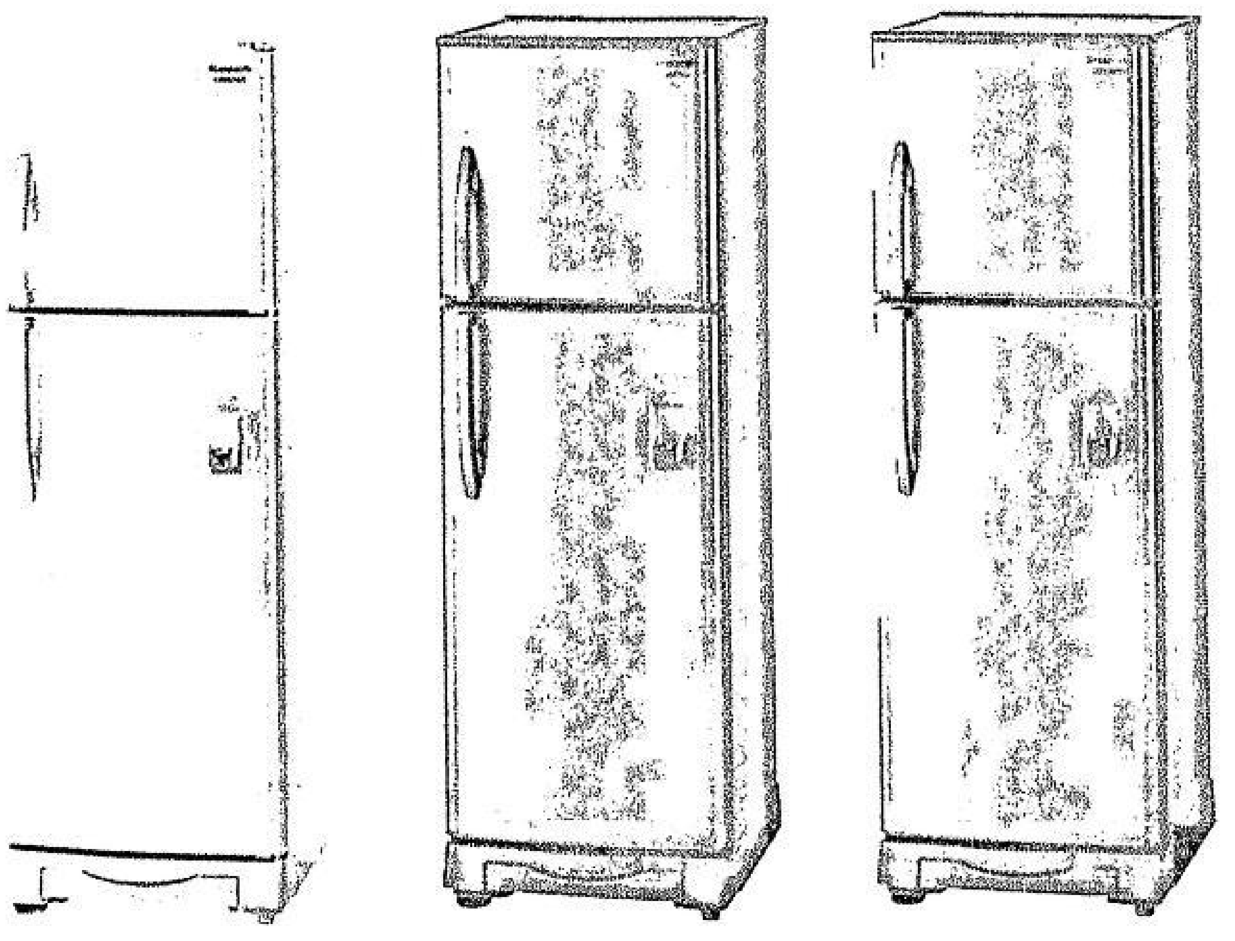


PANASONIC Frost-Free Refrigerator

Must-have for a cooking whiz

TAKE IT FROM A CULINARY EXpert.

With all the aggravation preparing for the holidays causes, a good frost-free refrigerator is a big help.

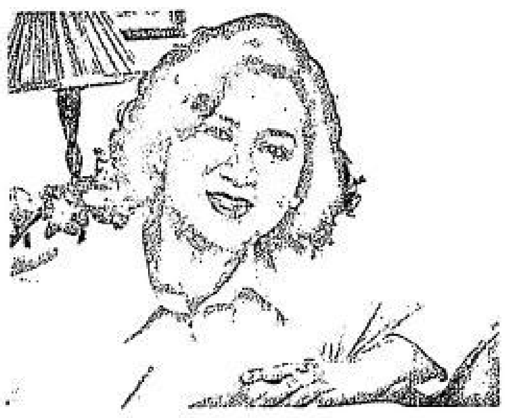
Sylvia Reynoso Gala says her Panasonic Frost-Free Refrigerator takes away the hassles of defrosting and gives her a little more time to do other things this Christmas.

With her Panasonic, she says she does not have to defrost her freezer regularly, which takes a lot of time and effort. The high EEF (energy efficiency) ratio also means less power consumption and more savings for her.

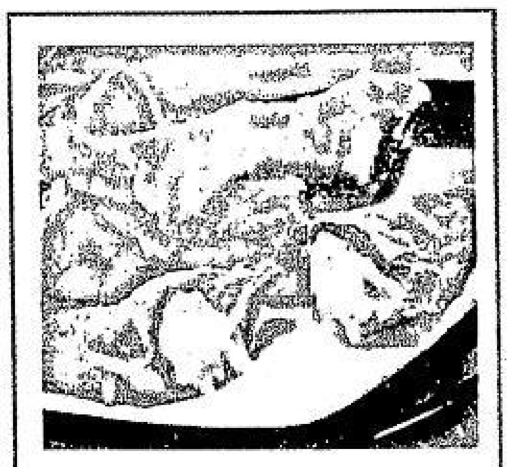
Reynoso Gala adds that her Panasonic ensures her ingredients remain fresh, an important factor in preparing great-tasting meals.

The refrigerator is simple to operate and preserves food the right way.

Reynoso Gala says, for her, Panasonic stands for quality, efficiency and durability.



SYLVIA Reynoso Gala



Filling snack for the holidays

GARDENIA OFFERS THIS easy recipe for instant entertaining this holiday season.

Fried Ice Cream

1 (400g) Gardenia Double Delights Ube & Cheese
1 pint vanilla ice cream
Cooking oil for frying
Fried ice cream batter:
2/3 c milk
1 c flour
3 tbsp sugar
2 pc eggs
1 tbsp butter, melted
Procedure:

1. Trim off each side of Gardenia Double Delights Ube & Cheese. Place a scoop of ice cream in the middle of the bread. Fold the bread forming a triangle. Press the edges using a fork to seal the bread. Place bread in the freezer.

2. For the batter: Mix together all the ingredients until smooth and creamy. Set aside.

3. For the fried ice cream: Dip bread in batter before putting it in hot oil. Fry until lightly brown. Fry breaded ice cream one at a time. Serve immediately. Sprinkle with powdered sugar or serve with chocolate, caramel or strawberry syrup.

X'mas party packages

HAVE ANY OF THE Jollibee Paskong Langhap-Sarap (JPLS) Party Packages for hassle-free yuletide celebrations whether at home or in the office.

The Christmas Super Meal A, at P104 per person, includes one piece Chickenjoy, one piece BurgerSteak, rice and a choice of 'Zert Pie. At P94 each, the Christmas Super Meal B has one piece Chickenjoy, two pieces Crispy Chicken Strips, rice and a choice of 'Zert pie.

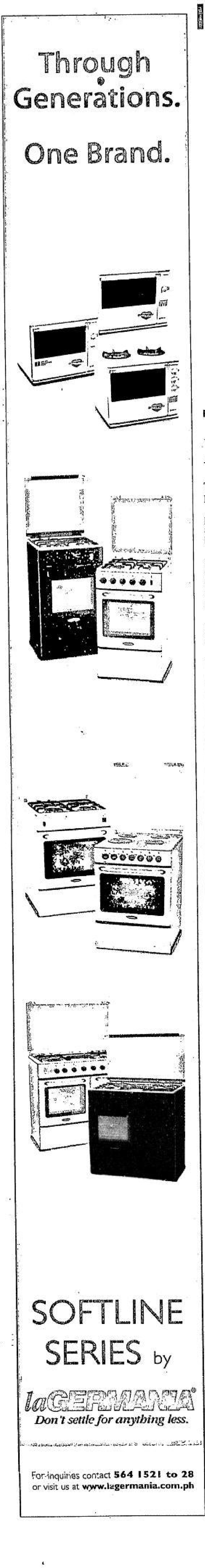
Party organizers can also mix and match for their own packages Jollibee items like Yumburger products, Jolly Hotdog, BurgerSteak, Chickenjoy and 'Zert Pies. Customized packages are priced P40-P115 each.

For parties with kids, Jollibee has JPLS Kiddie Packs with surprise gifts. For P66 each, kids get a Yumburger and juice and for P76 each, they can have one BurgerSteak meal and juice. The P92-per-person package includes one piece Chickenjoy with rice and juice.

Jollibee is also offering the Christmas Chickenjoy Bucket Treat in a limited-edition design. Six pieces of Chickenjoy, three cups of rice, three cups of mashed potatoes, three Rocky Road Sundaes, and three soft drinks cost P475.

The P429 bucket has six pieces of Chickenjoy, three cups of rice, three servings of Jolly Spaghetti and three soft drinks.

The P399 package contains six pieces Chickenjoy, three cups of rice, three 'Zert Pies and three soft drinks.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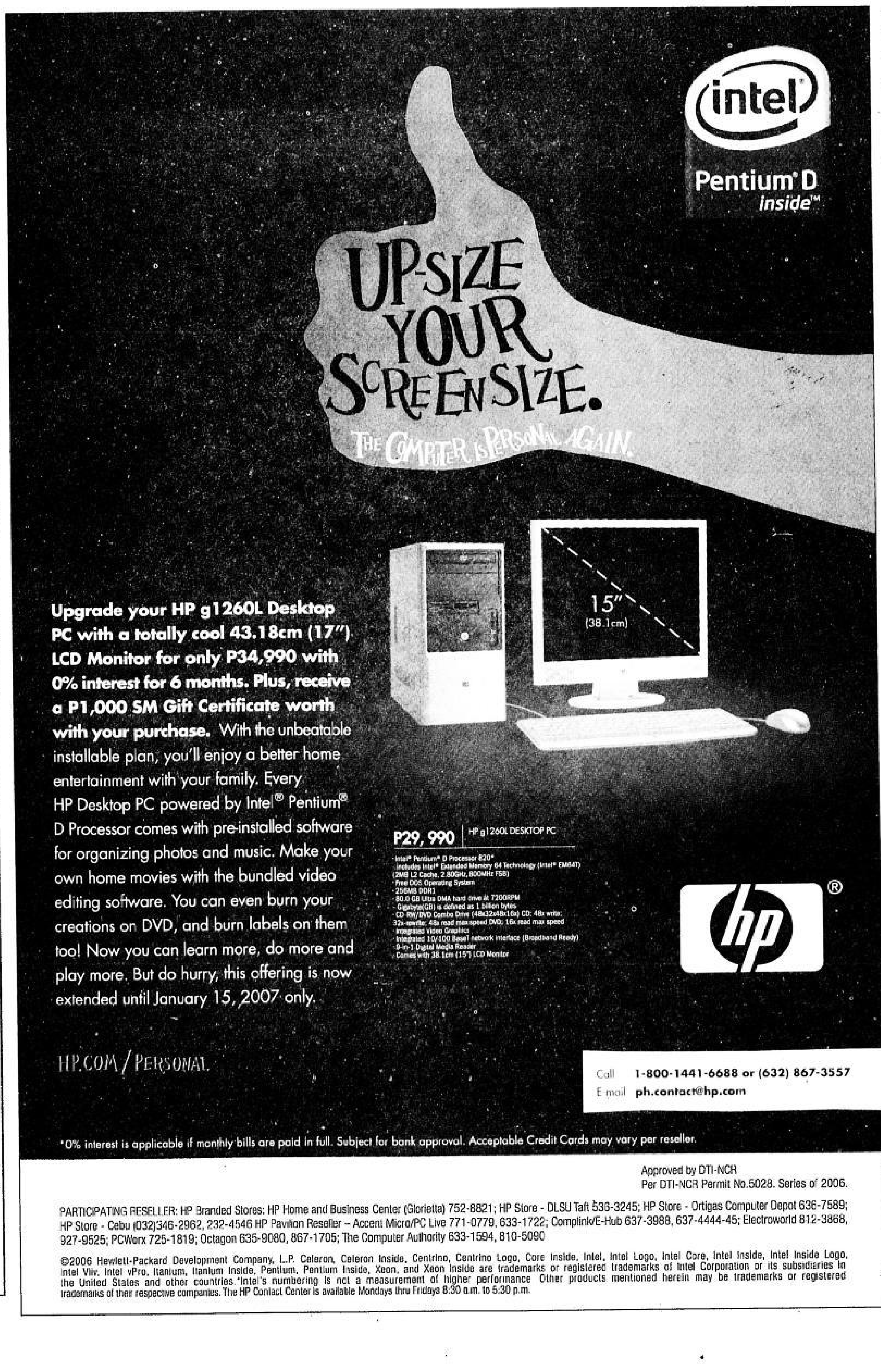

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ENTERTAINMENT

Editor **Emmie G. Velarde**

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AT THE FINALE on Saturday, (clockwise from left): Yeng Constantino sings her winning song on an elevated platform; ABS-CBN top execs Charo Santos-Concio and Gabby Lopez; Yeng and Irish Fullerton; with runners-up Jay-R Siaboc and Ronnie Liang; dance teacher Maribeth Bichara in a production number. PHOTOS BY RODEL ROTONI

Long road to the top

'Grand Star Dreamer' Yeng Constantino is a prolific songwriter

By Bayani San Diego Jr.

JOSEPHINE "YENG" CONSTANTINO's journey to the top, as grand winner of the ABS-CBN reality talent search "Pinoy Dream Academy," was long and arduous.

She bested 19 other contestants, or scholars as they were known on the show—including fellow members of the Headmaster's Honor List of Six, Chad Peralta, Ronnie Liang, Jay-R Siaboc, Panky Trinidad and Irish Fullerton—in the grand finals held at the Araneta Coliseum on Saturday.

Accompanied by mom Susan, Yeng took an FX taxi from Montalban, Rizal, to the ABS-CBN studios in Quezon City for the PDA auditions over four months ago.

"I didn't think I would make [the cut]. My voice was hoarse because I had a gig the night before. I also had asthma," she recalled for INQUIRER Entertainment in an exclusive interview held in her dressing room after the finals.

Hit originals

She used to perform with the Morning Glory band at the River Booze bar in Marikina before joining the contest. "We did covers of Kitchie Nadal, Barbie Almalbis and No Doubt. Sometimes, I sang my own songs, but they were ignored by the crowd."

Now, Yeng's compositions are heard not just on ABS-CBN TV and radio stations, but everywhere.

At the grand finals, she sang one of these, "Ang Awitin," which proved to be her winning piece. Another one, "Hawak-Kamay," became a hit while she was in the PDA house, and is now the theme song of Jose Javier Reyes' "Kasal, Kasali, Kasalo," Star Cinema's entry in the Metro Manila Film Festival.

Everyone, everywhere

Yeng said she gets inspiration from everyone, everywhere. "My songs are based on my own experiences, as well as those of my *tropa* (friends) and family."

"Her edge [over the others] was that she writes her own songs," PDA director Laurenti Dyogi noted.

Filmmaker Jose Javier Reyes, media performance teacher on the show, concurred: "More than the singers, PDA's most significant contribution [are] the songwriters."

"She can't be boxed in as pop-rock; she can sing and write anything," said voice teacher Moy Ortiz of the singing group The CompanY.

LONG/E3

ABS-CBN's Cory Vidanes and Endemol's (show franchiser) Ed Sharples

METRO MANILA FILM FESTIVAL

(Inquirer Entertainment is running this guide to help moviegoers plan their holiday cinema tour. The MMFF runs from Dec. 25 to Jan. 7, 2007.)

Zaszsa Zaturnnah Ze Moveeh

Stars Zsazsa Padilla, Rustom Padilla, Pops Fernandez, Alfred Vargas, Chokoleit, Pauleen Luna, Giselle Sanchez, Say Alonzo, KitKat, Glaiza de Castro, Joy Viado, Christian Bautista, Alwyn Uytingco

Directed by Joel Lamangan

Based on the comic book by Carlo Vergara, this iconic super-heroine caper is billed as Regal's "biggest" movie to date. "It's definitely the most expensive," says executive producer Lily Monteverde. "We hired the production design team of Visual Illusion Quest for special costumes, prosthetics and makeup. We flew in stunt directors and martial-arts experts from Hong Kong and Singapore." Regal pulled out all the stops, producer Roselle Monteverde-Teo concurs: "This movie boasts of more than 2,000 visual effects shots. We used the latest F/X software also utilized in Hollywood hits like 'Superman Returns' and 'X-Men.'" This is confirmed by Ignite Media's Dave Hukom. "We aimed for a photo-realistic effect. For the sequence depicting Planet X, there was wall-to-wall special effects." Lead star Zsazsa Padilla is impressed: "The fight scenes with the giant frog and Amazonistas were colorful and well-choreographed. It's hard to get bored with this film because it has music (by Vincent de Jesus), comedy, action and a bit of drama and romance." Perfect for the Christmas season, asserts director Joel Lamangan. "It's not just a gay movie; it's for the entire family."

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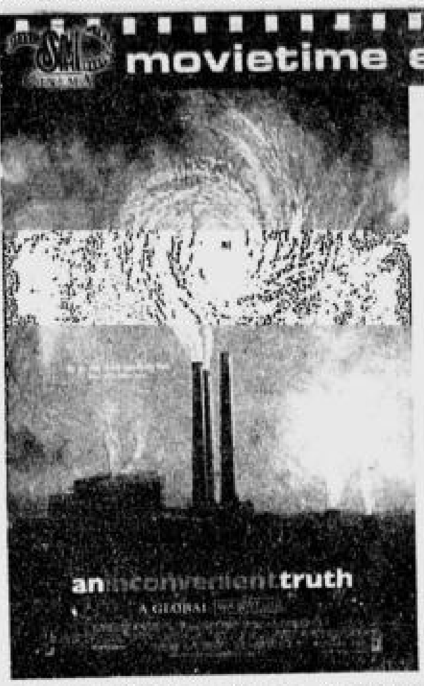

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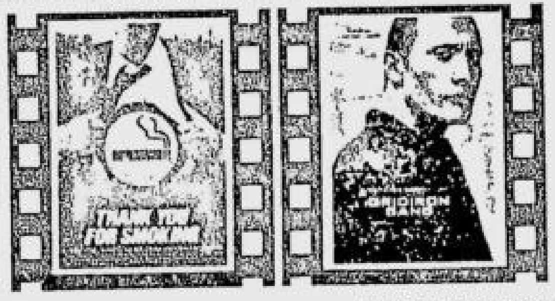

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Admission Price P200
1 CASINO ROYALE
2 SPIRIT TRAP
3 SHAOLIN vs EVIL DEAD
4 THE RETURN
5 BEST MOVIES OF 2006
6 AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH

PREMIERE CINEMA
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CINEMA 2
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1 HAPPY FEET
2 BARCELONA
3 INANG YAYA
4 BEST MOVIES OF 2006
5 SPIRIT TRAP
6 TENACIOUS D
7 HAPPY FEET
8 THE NATIVITY
9 SHAOLIN vs EVIL DEAD
10 REYNA
11 WAG KANG LILINGON
12 CASINO ROYALE

SM MEGACINEMA 633-1901
1 HAPPY FEET
2 THE NATIVITY
3 INANG YAYA
4 CASINO ROYALE
5 TENACIOUS D
6 BEST MOVIES OF 2006
7 AN INCONVENIENT TRUTH
8 SHAOLIN vs EVIL DEAD
9 WAG KANG LILINGON
10 REYNA
11 SPIRIT TRAP
12 FRAGILE

SM CITY FAIRVIEW 935-0749
1 THE NATIVITY
2 REYNA
3 WAG KANG LILINGON
4 BEST MOVIES OF 2006
5 SHAOLIN vs EVIL DEAD
6 TENACIOUS D
7 CASINO ROYALE
8 HAPPY FEET
9 THANK YOU FOR SMOKING
10 SPIRIT TRAP
11 FRAGILE
12 INANG YAYA

SM CITY STA. MESA 716-1416
1 CASINO ROYALE
2 HAPPY FEET
3 SPIRIT TRAP
4 BEST MOVIES OF 2006
5 WAG KANG LILINGON
6 SHAOLIN vs EVIL DEAD
7 THE NATIVITY
8 BARCELONA
9 REYNA
10 TENACIOUS D

SM CITY SAN LAZARO 786-2488
1 HAPPY FEET
2 BEST MOVIES OF 2006
3 TENACIOUS D
4 BARCELONA
5 THE NATIVITY
6 WAG KANG LILINGON

SM CITY SOUTHMALL 806-6888
1 THE NATIVITY
2 TENACIOUS D
3 SPIRIT TRAP
4 BEST MOVIES OF 2006
5 SHAOLIN vs EVIL DEAD
6 CASINO ROYALE
7 WAG KANG LILINGON
8 HAPPY FEET
9 REYNA

SM CITY BICUTAN 776-3055
1 SUPERMAN RETURNS
2 SUKOB
3 X-MEN 3
4 M.I:III

SM CITY MANILA 523-9240
1 GRIDIRON GANG
2 TENACIOUS D
3 THE NATIVITY
4 BEST MOVIES OF 2006
5 HAPPY FEET
6 CASINO ROYALE
7 SHAOLIN vs EVIL DEAD
8 SPIRIT TRAP
9 WAG KANG LILINGON
10 THE RETURN
11 REYNA
12 FRAGILE

SM CITY DASMARINAS (046)4323201-04
1 MEE-SHEE
2 THE RETURN
3 HAPPY FEET
4 FEAST

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1 SUPERMAN RETURNS
2 THE RETURN
3 SANTA CALUSE 3
4 FLAGS OF OUR FATHERS

SM CITY SUCAT 829-4975
1 SUPERMAN RETURNS
2 X-MEN 3
3 SUKOB
4 TILL I MET YOU

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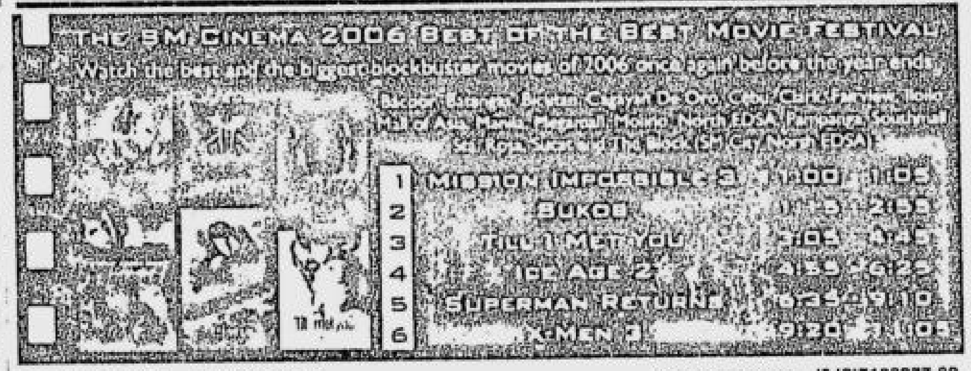

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[illegible]
1 MISSION IMPOSSIBLE 3 [illegible]
2 SUKOB [illegible]
3 TILL I MET YOU [illegible]
4 ICE AGE 2 [illegible]
5 SUPERMAN RETURNS [illegible]
6 X-MEN 3 [illegible]

LUZON

SM CITY BACOOR (046)417-3868
1 TENACIOUS D
2 BEST MOVIES OF 2006
3 HAPPY FEET
4 SHAOLIN vs EVIL DEAD
5 CASINO ROYALE
6 WAG KANG LILINGON
7 DECK THE HALLS
8 REYNA

SM CITY CLARK (045)625-5844-45
1 HAPPY FEET
2 FRAGILE
3 THE MARINE
4 SCHOOL FOR SCOUNDRELS
5 WAG KANG LILINGON
6 BEST MOVIES OF 2006

SM CITY MARILAO (044)0332013-17
1 HAPPY FEET
2 THE BANQUET
3 WAG KANG LILINGON
4 SANTA CLAUSE 3

SM CITY BATANGAS 865-6401-04
1 SUPERMAN RETURNS
2 X-MEN 3
3 SUKOB
4 M.I:III

SM CITY PAMPANGA (045)6037081-85
1 SUKOB
2 CASINO ROYALE
3 THE MARINE
4 INANG YAYA
5 MEE-SHEE
6 BEST MOVIES OF 2006

SM CIY LIPA (043) 756-7926
1 STEP UP
2 HAPPY FEET
3 THE RETURN
4 MEE-SHEE

SM CITY LUCENA (042)7108977-80
1 THE MARINE
2 ANG PAMANA
3 SCHOOL FOR SCOUNDRELS
4 FLAGS OF OUR FATHERS

SM CITY BAGUIO (074)6197838-39
1 SANTA CLAUISE 3
2 BOA
3 HAPPY FEET
4 MEE-SHEE

SM SUPERCENTER MOLINO (046)474-3100
1 BEST MOVIES OF 2006
2 ANG PAMANA
3 BARNYARD
4 SCHOOL FOR SCOUNDRELS

SM CITY STA. ROSA (049)5341205-66
1 SANTA CLAUSE 3
2 BEST MOVIES OF 2006
3 HAPPY FEET
4 FEAST

VISAYAS MINDANAO

SM CITY CEBU (032)231-3876
1 THE MARINE
2 CASINO ROYALE
3 BEST MOVIES OF 2006
4 THE NATIVITY
5 HAPPY FEET
6 FRAGILE
7 BOA
8 WAG KANG LILINGON

SM CITY ILOILO (033)3209422
1 MEE-SHEE
2 BEST MOVIES OF 2006
3 HAPPY FEET
4 ZU WARRIORS
5 THE NATIVITY
6 CASINO ROYALE
7 RESERVED
8 FRAGILE

SM CITY DAVAO (082)2976998
1 MEE-SHEE
2 CASINO ROYALE
3 FRAGILE
4 THE NATIVITY
5 FEAST
6 HAPPY FEET

SM CITY CAGAYAN (088)859-2884
1 SUPERMAN RETURNS
2 M.I:III
3 X-MEN 3
4 ICE AGE 2

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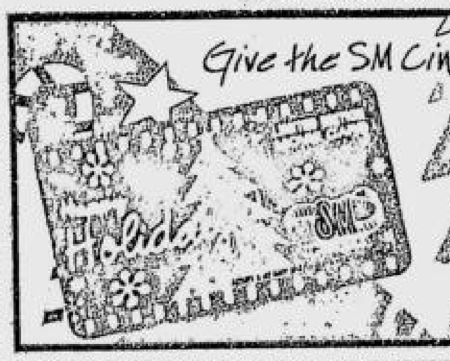

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GALLERIA 632-9116

1 CASINO ROYALE • THX
1:00 4:00 7:00 10:00
2 HAPPY FEET
12:00 2:30 5:00 7:30 10:00
3 SA ILALIM NG COGON
12:00 1:50 3:40 5:30 7:20 9:10
4 SHAOLIN VS. EVIL DEAD 2
1:00 3:15 5:30 7:45 10:00
5 TENACIOUS D
1:30 3:35 5:40 7:45 9:50
6 SPIRIT TRAP
12:40 3:00 5:20 7:40 10:00
7 THE NATIVITY STORY
12:30 2:50 5:10 7:30 9:50
8 REYNA
12:20 2:45 5:10 7:35 10:00
9 BORAT
10 KAMA SUTRA 3
12:00 2:00 4:00 6:00 8:00 10:00

ERMITA 636-7809 to 12

1 TENACIOUS D 12:35 2:50 5:05 7:25 9:50
2 REYNA 12:00 1:50 3:40
THE NATIVITY STORY 6:00 8:00 10:00
3 HAPPY FEET
11:00 1:10 3:20 5:30 7:40 9:50
4 CASINO ROYALE
11:00 1:40 4:20 7:00 9:50
5 SPIRIT TRAP
12:35 2:50 5:05 7:25 9:50
6 SHAOLIN VS. EVIL DEAD 2
12:35 2:50 5:05 7:25 9:50
7 KAMA SUTRA 3
12:35 2:50 5:05 7:25 9:50

METRO EAST 682-8193 / 682-8199

1 REYNA
1:00 3:00 5:00 7:00 9:00
2 HAPPY FEET
11:05 1:35 4:05 6:35 9:05
3 SHAOLIN VS. EVIL DEAD 2
11:30 1:55 4:20 6:45 9:10
4 THE NATIVITY STORY
11:50 2:10 4:30 6:50 9:10
5 TENACIOUS D
11:50 2:10 4:30 6:50 9:10
6 SPIRIT TRAP
11:50 2:10 4:30 6:50 9:10
7 CASINO ROYALE
12:30 3:20 6:10 9:00
8 INANG YAYA

NOVALICHES 935-3231 / 935-3229-30

1 CASINO ROYALE
2 HAPPY FEET
3 SHAOLIN VS. EVIL DEAD 2
4 REYNA

CITISQUARE MALABON 288-2576

1 ANG PAMANA: THE INHERITANCE
2 REYNA
3 RESERVE
4 RESERVE

PIONEER 887-5378

1 TENACIOUS D
2 HAPPY FEET
3 SHAOLIN VS. EVIL DEAD 2
4 SPIRIT TRAP

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3 MY FIRST WEDDING
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1 HAPPY FEET
2 THE RETURN
3 THE BUTTERFLY EFFECT 2
4 SCHOOL FOR SCOUNDRELS

DASMARIÑAS (046) 8520125 (046) 416-4332

1 FEAST
2 BARNYARD
3 SCHOOL FOR SCOUNDRELS
4 EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH

ANGELES (045) 892-2348

1 THE MARINE
2 ZU WARRIORS
3 SCHOOL FOR SCOUNDRELS
4 CAKE

IMUS (046) 875-3838 (046) 471-8188

1 HAPPY FEET
2 DECK THE HALLS
3 FEAST
4 REYNA

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1 HAPPY FEET
2 MEE-SHEE
3 REYNA
4 THE RETURN
5 FRAGILE
6 THE MARINE

BACOLOD (034) 441-0453 (034) 441-0459

1 FRAGILE
2 BARNYARD
3 HAPPY FEET
4 CASINO ROYALE
5 THE NATIVITY STORY
6 MEE-SHEE

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1 FRAGILE
2 MEE-SHEE
3 HAPPY FEET
4 THE TEXAS CHAINSAW MASSACRE

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ROUNDUP

DESIREE DEL VALLE

'Tuli' goes to Sundance

"TULI," A DIGITAL Viva production, will be shown at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival, which runs Jan. 18 to 28 in Salt Lake City, Ogden, Utah.

The movie is based on a screenplay by Jimmy Flores, winner of the 1st FSR Scriptwriting Contest. It was directed by Auraeus Solito.

It will be screened in the festival's out-of-competition Spectrum Section.

"Tuli" tells the story of Daisy, a young girl who copes with the behavior of her abusive father, who circumcise the young men in their village.

It stars Desiree del Valle, Carlo Aquino, Vanna Garcia and Bembol Roco.

'Streetdance Battle 2'

The University of the Philippines-Diliman and Xavier High School emerged as grand champions of "Skechers Streetdance Battle 2."

Both teams received P100,000 in cash.

The event will be shown on ETC tomorrow, 9 p.m. and on Dec. 24, 5 p.m.

First runners-up Colegio de San Juan de Letran (High School) and Mapua-Makati (College) received P60,000 each, and 2nd runners-up Colegio de Sta. Rosa-Makati (High School) and UP-Manila (College), P40,000.

'Blood Diamond'

Warner Bros.' thriller "Blood Diamond," starring Leonardo DiCaprio, Jennifer Connelly and Djimon Hounsou, recently won two awards from America's National Board of Review—Best Supporting Actor for Housou and one of the Ten Best Films of 2006.

Set against the chaos and civil war that enveloped 1990s Sierra Leone, the film tells the story of Danny Archer (DiCaprio), an ex-mercenary from Zimbabwe, and Soloman Vandy (Hounsou), a Mende fisherman.

Both are African, but their histories and circumstances are as different as any can be until their fates become joined in a common quest to recover a rare pink diamond.

The movie opens in local theaters on Jan. 6.

'Star Wars'

"Star Wars—The Complete Saga" airs exclusively on Star Movies every Sunday at 9 p.m.

The episodes will be aired on the following dates: "Attack of the Clones," Dec. 24; "Revenge of the Sith," Dec. 31; "A New Hope," Jan. 7; "The Empire Strikes Back," Jan. 14; and "Return of the Jedi," Jan. 21.

Long road to the top

From page E1

Even her fiercest competitors acknowledged that Yeng's songwriting ability was her primary asset.

"She's the youngest songwriter I know," said second runner-up Ronnie Liang. "She's very talented and her songs inspire the youth," first runner-up Jay-R Siaboc agreed.

Expelled scholar Davey Langit, who was rated by mentor Reyes as Yeng's equal in songwriting, opined that Yeng's "sheer talent" was the deciding factor.

A standout

"She stood out from the start. I first noticed her at the kick-off in Cebu last August," voice teacher Sweet Plantado, also of The CompanY, said of Yeng.

In the dressing room, the "Grand Star Dreamer" handed her medal over to dad Joselito, who proudly wore it on their way home.

"You're the *real* Grand Star Dreamer," Yeng told her father and staunchest supporter, she said. "Even though I wanted to give up, he kept encouraging me."

Yeng, who turned 18 on Dec. 4, said her triumph was a "wonderful birthday gift."

"I first noticed her singing talent when she was only three years old," dad Joselito said of the youngest in his brood of five.

Best prize

More than the P1-million cash prize and the one-year recording contract, Yeng said PDA's most significant reward for her was the opportunity to "grow and change."

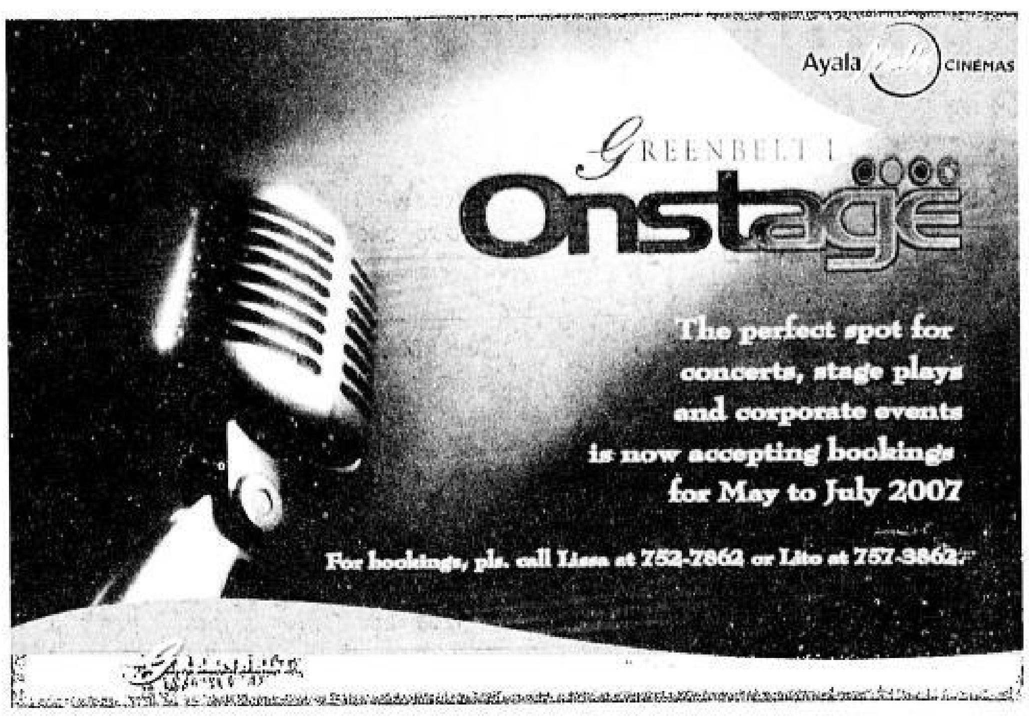
"I was a spoiled [kid]," Yeng admitted. "I learned to wash clothes and dishes only in the PDA house."

On her way out of the dressing room, a production staffer reminded Yeng of the next few days' appointments—TV guestings, as well as Christmas parties, birthday bashes and corporate-sponsored victory celebrations.

The hard work begins.

Next stop for Dyogi's team is the second season of "Pinoy Big Brother," to be launched in March 2007.

"There'll be a lot of surprises," Dyogi said. "The house will be bigger; Big Brother will be stricter. There will be housemates from abroad, whom we auditioned along with the PDA Global scholars."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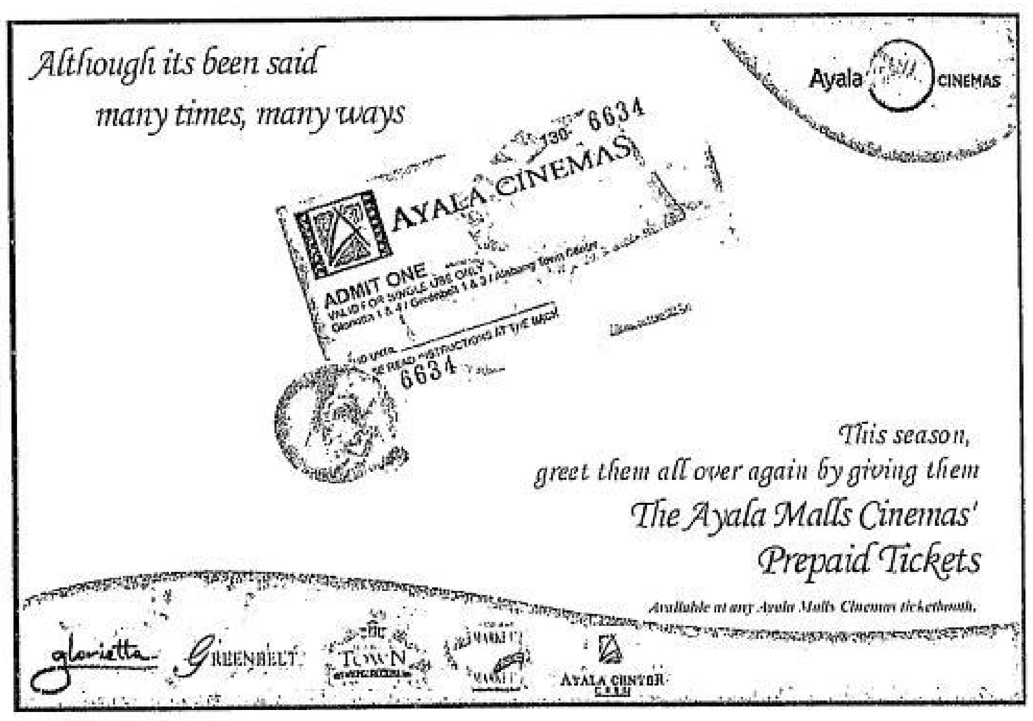
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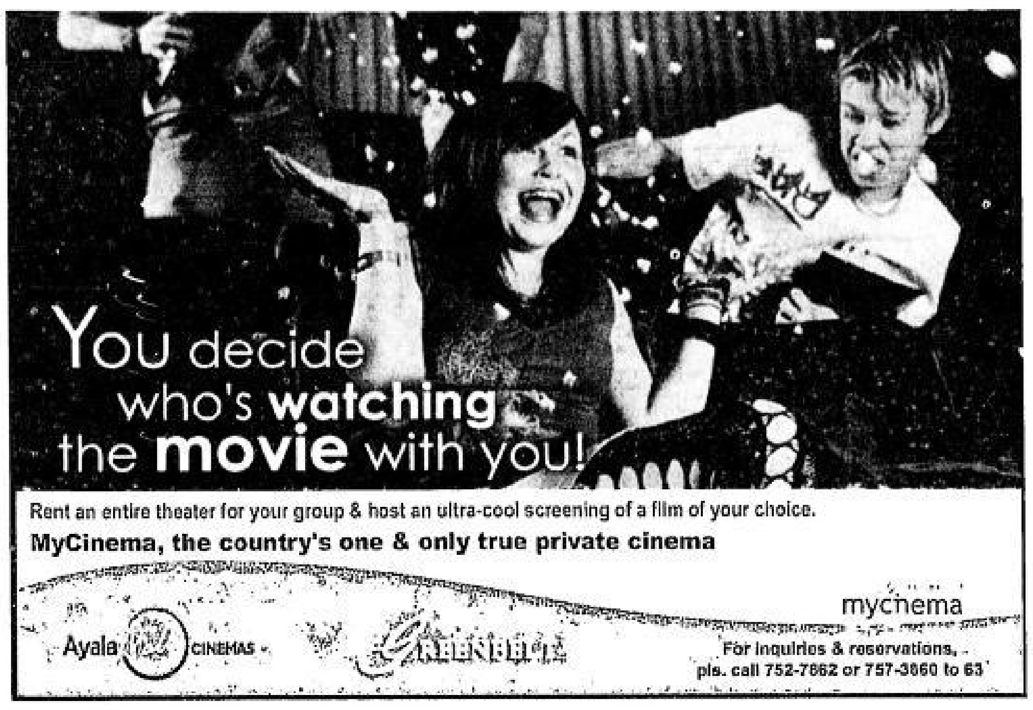
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ALL THE KING'S MEN 1:40 / 4:20 / 7:00 / 9:40
BORAT 1:00 / 3:10 / 5:20 / 7:30 / 9:40
HAPPY FEET 12:10 / 2:30 / 4:50 / 7:10 / 9:30
DOLBY DIGITAL-EX
CASINO ROYALE 1:20 / 4:10 / 7:00 / 9:50
INANG YAYA 12:30 / 2:40 / 7:10
ALL THE KING'S MEN 1:00 / 3:40 / 6:20 / 9:00
ALIMALL 5
SPIRIT TRAP 12:40 / 2:40 / 4:40 / 6:40 / 8:40
CASINO ROYALE 12:00 / 2:50 / 5:40 / 8:30
TENACIOUS 'D' 1:20 / 3:40 / 6:00 / 8:20
SHAOLIN vs EVIL DEAD 12:10 / 2:10 / 4:10 / 6:10 / 8:10
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2. Promo is open to all patrons (paying customers) of the featured films of the MMFF. Promo period is from December 25, 2006 to January 5, 2007.
3. On the first time a participant purchases one (1) ticket at any participating theater showing any of the featured films he/she receives an Official Cash sa Pelikula Promo Card.
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5. On each card are spaces for the featured films. Each time a participant watches any of the featured films at any participating theater, assigned theater personnel will stamp with official promo markings the spaces/logos corresponding to the film.
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7. All forms of free passes (MTRCB Pass, Makati Senior Citizens, etc.) will not be qualified to avail of the promo card or any promo marking
8. Valid entries may be dropped at drop boxes located at the participating theaters. Deadline of submission of entries is on January 5, 2007 at 11pm.
9. If a name is drawn more than once in the Grand draw, he/she gets the bigger prize.
10. Grand Draw will be on January 13, 2007 at the Star City Activity Center
11. Only Official Representatives of MBC, NCAP, MMFF Executive Committee and DTI will validate all winning raffle entries during draws.
12. All entries shall be gathered at a designated area at SM Mall of Asia, Pasay City. After which, all entries shall be picked up by MBC representatives and transported to th Grand Draw site.
13. Winners will be notified through registered mail and announced on-air thru respective MBC radio stations
14. Grand Prize Winner may claim his/her prize at MBC Head Office. Provincial winners can claim their prizes at the nearest MBC Station specified in the registered mail.
15. Winners are required to present a valid ID and the registered notice when claiming prizes.
16. All raffle prizes should be claimed within sixty (60) days from receipt of notification otherwise will be forfeited in favor of MBC upon approval of DTI.
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Per DTI-NCR Permit #6517, Series of 2006.

How stars make up . . .

From page E6

ten is?—Why indeed?

Well, at least we'll be seeing Gretchen in "Karma"—that's definitely better than nothing, and could even be better than something if she comes up with an interesting portrayal that benefits from her new maturity.

The Metro film fest showcases another comeback performance, this time by a younger star, in the person of **Sandara Park**. Only a couple of years ago, Sandara was the flavor of the season in local show business, with TV and film starrers galore.

Mystifyingly, however, she chose to give all that up to go home to South Korea. Well, when she finally decided to return, her career prospects had decidedly dimmed, as her fans transferred their allegiance to more immediately available teen faves.

So, Sandara is trying to get back into the film groove with the festival entry, "Super Noypi," and we wish her the very best, because local movies could make good use of her pertness and spunk.

Also making up for lost time is **Lito Lapid** in "Tatlong Baraha." The action star-turned-politician is out to recover lost ground in the movies—and to energize public interest in him, now that he's contemplating running for mayor in Makati.

Politics and show biz, show biz and politics—they're all interrelated, particularly in these parts.

We hope that Lapid's comeback is a successful one, because we like his offhand, aw-shucks acting style as an action star.

Instead of straining and mugging like **Robin Padilla**, he plays it natural and hero-next-door, and thus projects an Everyman quality that makes it easy for "ordinary" viewers to relate to him.

Which is also why he made it as a *politician*, as well. We're back to that show biz-politics cycle again!

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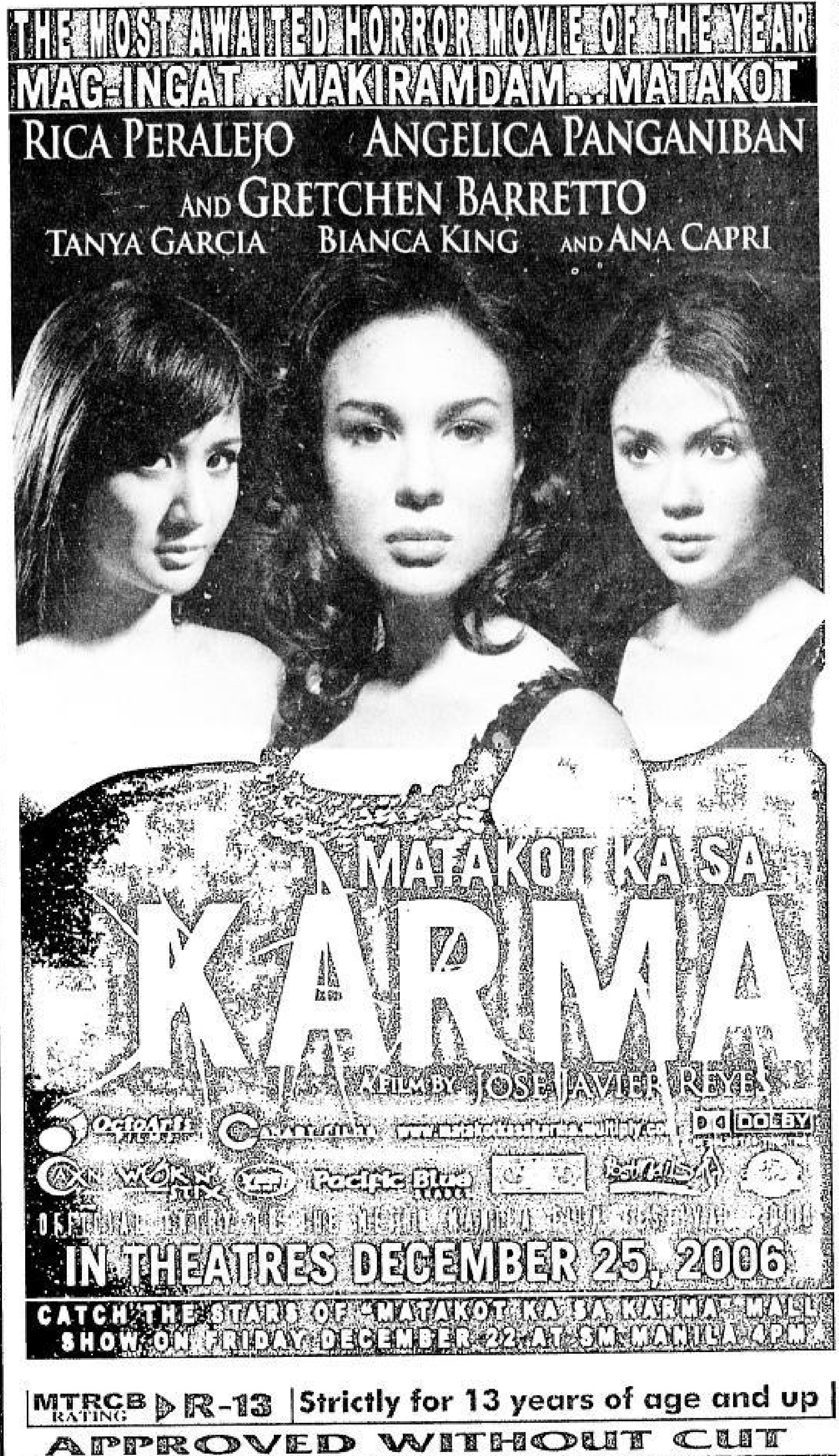
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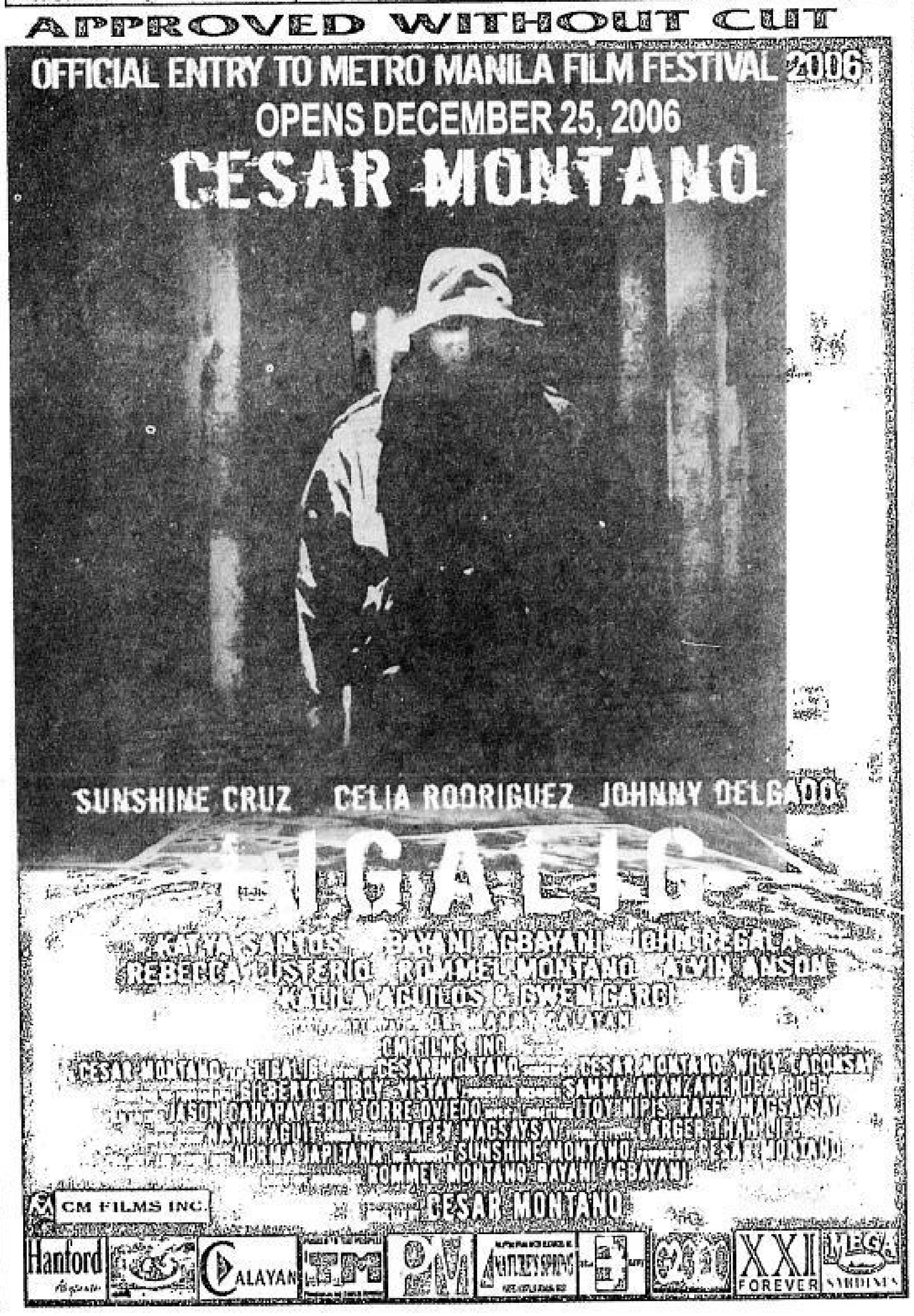
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PG-13

3 DECK THE HALLS
12:50, 3:10, 5:30
G
CASINO ROYALE
7:50, 11:00
PG-13

4 HAPPY FEET
1:05, 3:35, 6:05, 8:35, 11:00
G

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MTRCB GP
1 20, 3 30, 5 40, 7 50, 10 00
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11:20, 1:35, 3:50, 6:05, 8:20, 10:35
R-13
CINEMA 5 HAPPY FEET
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Aga & Charlene are serious . . .

From page E6

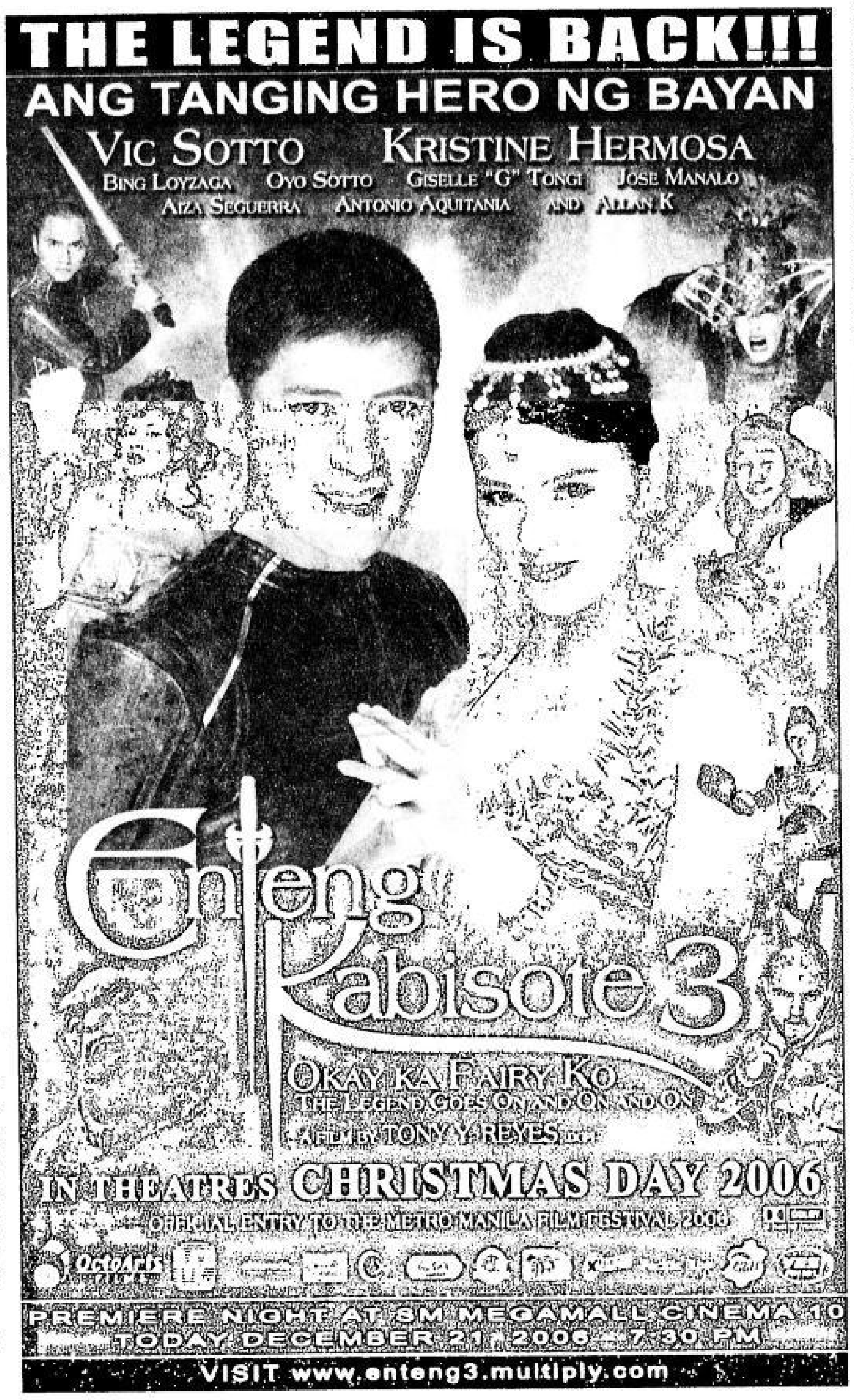
Gretchen Barretto, Rica Peralejo, Angelica Panganiban, Anna Capri, Tanya Garcia, Derek Ramsey and Rafael Rosel. Rica is well aware of karmic laws tackled in the film. In a way, her newfound faith as a Born-again Christian has made her more attuned to what's right for her. That includes Mr. Right. "I've stopped looking; I just keep praying. I know He will send the right one my way soon." Right on, Rica!

FYI (For Your Indulgence)

I had a blast hanging out with **Diether Ocampo** and **Kristine Hermosa** backstage during the "Unang Hakbang" benefit concert for Diet's KIDS foundation. They were both tired with all the preparations but the successful turn out was more than enough compensation, Diet said. "I'm so touched that all the bands agreed to perform for free. **Sam Milby** volunteered to sing. He went out of his way *talaga*. Nice guy. He's just misunderstood by some people."

Diet lost his dad at a young age but he enjoys being a surrogate dad to all his "adopted" kids. "Feeling *ko tuloy ang dami na naming anak ni* Tin (laughs)!" Kudos to you, Diet! *Ulirang ama at kaibigan!*

E-mail wateringholeshangrila@yahoo.com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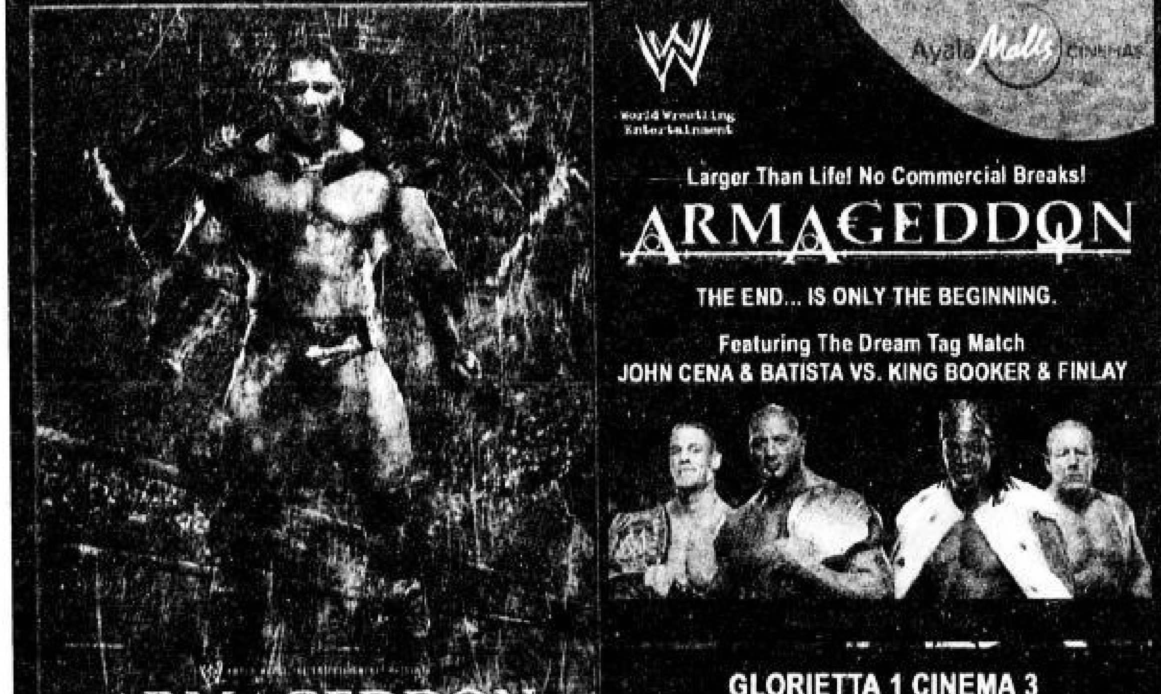
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How stars make up for lost time

VIEWFINDER

Nestor U. Torre

ON THE LOCAL ENTERTAINMENT SCENE, the operative rule is: Out of sight, out of mind: That's why stars who go on an extended leave from the biz feel very insecure, and make splashy comebacks as soon as possible. Most of the time, however, it's too late to heat their careers back up to their previous level or intensity.

There are exceptions, of course—like **Sharon Cuneta, Vilma Santos** and (dare we hope?) **Nora Aunor**. But a lot depends on the nature, quality and bigness of their comeback projects.

For most stars, however, comebacks are decidedly a vertical climb. On the silver screen these days, **Gretchen Barretto** is poised to make her big comeback, after many years of absence, in the Metro film fest entry, "Matakot Ka Sa Karma."

> It's often too late to heat their careers back up to their previous level or intensity

This explains why Gretchen has been in the public eye these days—promoting her movie, coming up with "honest" and therefore controversial statements, declarations, opinions and revelations, etc.

This has served to what the public's interest in Gretchen's persona, and hopefully, in her performance in "Karma," enough to make it a should-see at the festival in many people's books.

Unfortunately, Gretchen has also stirred a teapot tempest with some other stars that has irked her significant other, who has dissuaded her from accepting other roles in the near future. Why exchange her placid socialite's life for the clangorous mess that local show biz of-

HOW STARS/ E4

AGA AND CHARLENE with their twins Atasha and Andres

Aga & Charlene are serious but also fun parents

DOLLY WOOD

Dolly Anne Carvajal

MY LONGTIME FRIENDSHIP WITH **AGA** and **Charlene Muhlach** serves as my sanctuary. When I feel burnt out, I don't even have to run to them. They're always right there standing by me, very much like the theme of their latest Jollibee TV commercial "Coming Home." It features their adorable twins **Andres** and **Atasha**. The ad reminds us that amid the holiday rush, No. 1 on our "Christ-MUST" list should be our family.

As Aga puts it, "I hardly go out. Sometimes, I wonder if I'm missing out on something. But I'm happy just staying home with my family. B (Charlene) and I never run out of things to talk about. When we have *tampuhan*, we make sure to patch things up right away. *Di ka pwede magmalaki sa asawa mo. Burado na lahat ng nakasanayan ko nung* single *pa ko*."

Is he ruling out show biz for his twins? "I'm not against it but I will not encourage them. I'd rather that they finish their studies abroad. I want Andres to be self-reliant at an early age like me. The future suitors of Atasha better watch out. I will give them a hard time (laughs)!"

Charlene agrees. "*Ngayon pa lang* when Atasha tells him that she has a BF in school, Aga gets so *inis*! *Ako naman* when Andres says he has a crush *na*, I get jealous!"

It was such a delight listening to their amusing parenthood anecdotes. (Aga got shocked seeing Atasha in "pandalaga" undies. "*Pinapalitan ko agad ng may* ruffles!").

The Muhlachs take parenting seriously but they keep it fun. Even without the billboards and TV ads, they are really one jolly family.

Super Noypi

Regal Entertainment's "Super Noypi" is bound to be the newest superhero craze. It's about seven young super heroes whose goals are to retrieve their kidnapped parents and save the world. Top-billed by **Jennylyn Mercado, Mark Herras, Polo Ravales, John Prats, Sandara Park, Katrina Halili** and the next "Aga"—**Andrew Muhlach**.

The movie boasts of high-tech computer-animated and visual effects executed by Hollywood-based artists, plus stunts directed by Hong Kong's Phillip Ko. You must stay until after the closing credits to see the clincher that's vital for "Super Noypi 2!"

I asked Jen and Polo what they would change in show biz if they had super powers. Jen said, "I'd erase all the bad elements in the biz 'cause a single negative issue can hurt one's career." Polo quips, "I'll wipe away the *kaplastikan*."

The young stars' different powers in the film and their awesome stunts (Mark's dancing in mid-air, Jen's helicopter sequence, Polo's real punch in the stomach) truly makes them worthy of hero worship.

Santa Richard

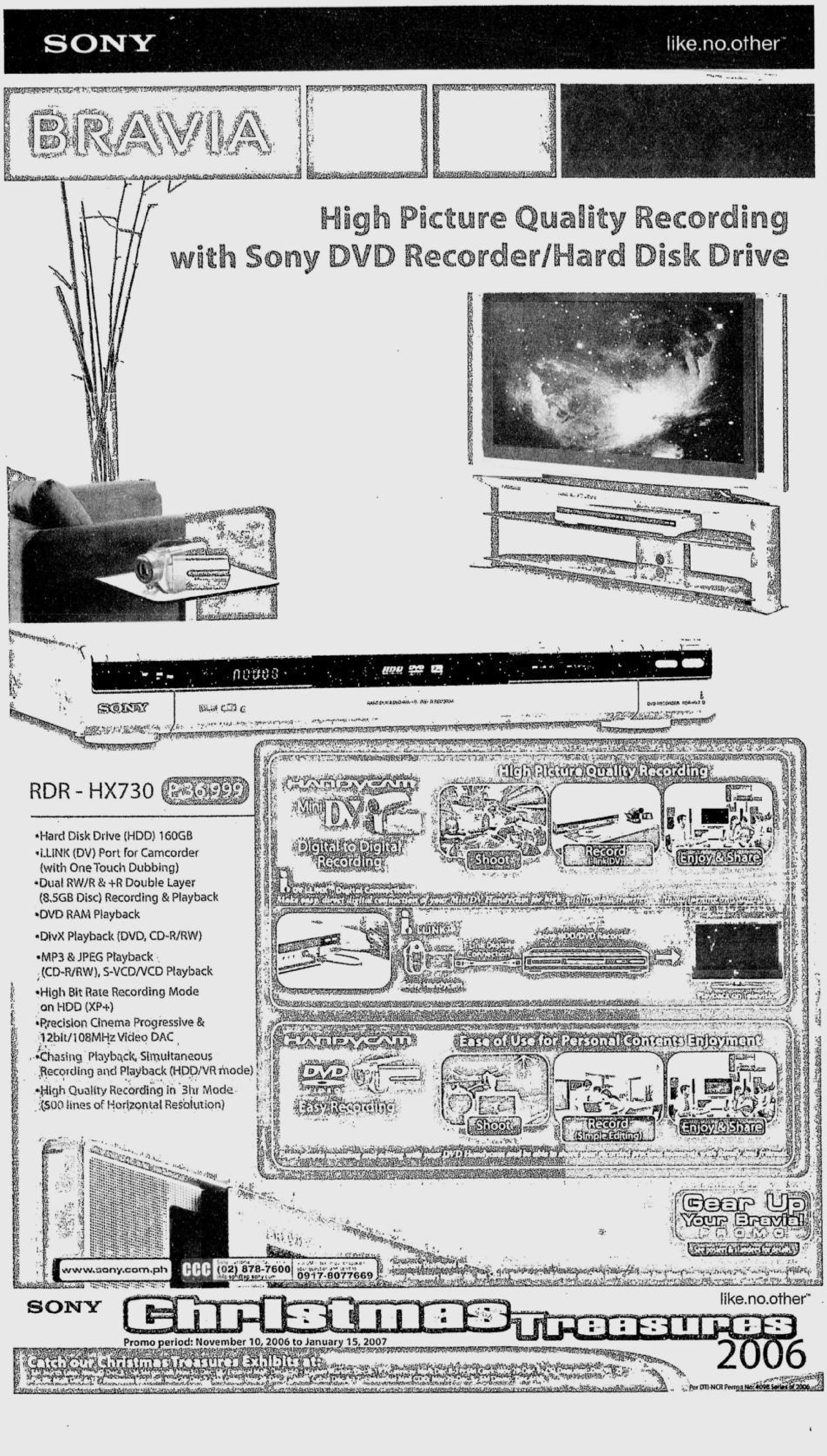
Richard Gutierrez played Santa when he threw a Christmas party for the movie press in Imperial Palace Suites. His ever fab Mom (Tita **Annabelle**), hip twin bro **Raymond** and lovable PR **Jun Lalin** helped entertain his guests. Even if Richard is already made, he has not lost sight of the people who have paved the way for him.

On top of the lavish raffle prizes he gave away that night, it's Richard's taking time out from his toxic holiday schedule to be with the press that makes him nonpareil. Catch him in "Mano Po 5: Gua Ai Di," where he is reunited with **Angel Locsin**. No wonder his colleagues all bow to him as if saying "Mano Po, 'Chard! You're tops in the 'sharing' department!"

'Matakot Ka Sa Karma'

Canary Films MMFF entry, "Matakot Ka Sa Karma," is a heart-in-your throat horror trilogy with seamless storytelling, penned and directed by **Jose Javier Reyes**. It stars

AGA & CHARLENE/ E5



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